

Dungeon Keeper - To the Stars

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Summary: The peoples of the Milky Way have lived the last tenthousand years under the yoke of the Goa'uld. Most think their lot bad. They do so, because they have yet to meet a Dungeon Keeper...

1. Prologue

INTRODUCTION

****"Stargate" is both the name of a 1994 movie and several ****long running TV series', in which the protagonists travel in between the stars, fight aliens and uphold the American way of life.**

****"Dungeon Keeper" on the other hand is the name of a video game franchise that takes place on an unnamed world and chronicles the struggles of a demon on his way to world domination â€“ who is aided by a wonderfully snarky narrator. To my knowledge there are two games that are worthy to bear the name and there is ****one unofficial sequel by the name of "War for the Overworld", which isn't quite as good as the other two but is still a lot of ****fun. **

**Both franchises premiered in July of 1997, strangely enough, and yet today, the almost 20 years later, hardly any crossovers exist between them â€“ which is a damn shame... **

This story pits a slightly different Dungeon Keeper against the Jaffa, the Goa'uld, the Tau'ri and whoever else he can manage to annoy. In the words of Richard Ridings:

****Never eat anything bigger than your own head, Keeper."**

PROLOGUE

There are a lot of misconceptions going around concerning Dungeon Keepers. Some call us demons. Most call us Evil. Some whisper about

dark rituals. About favored minions. About ascendance.

None of that is true. You do not become a Dungeon Keeper any more than a dove becomes a star, or a planet becomes a waterflea. You either are a Keeper, or you are not. We do not care about "Good" and "Evil" either. And we are no demons.

Keepers are conquerors, plain and simple. Always have been, always will be, and we do what we will do achieve victory. From world to world we travel, to fight all in our path. To crush all opposition, and then move on to the next challenge. From the first time a sentient blinked, back at the dawn of creation, to the last breath of a dying universe, we will be there. We will be there when the stars go out, when the last planets are ground into dust. And when the last star faces extinction, we will be there, on the last world, waging one ultimate war before the end. Some of us believe that he who wins that war will become the god of the next universe, it is as close to a religion as Dungeon Keepers get. Personally, I do not appreciate the mentality that comes with that belief. Or with "believe" itself. I do not need that incentive to stay alive. Nor do I aim to become a god. I am what I am. A Keeper. I know what my place is in the universe and I do not seek to change it. All is right with the world.

Well, maybe not this world.

* * *

><p>I arrived on this plane like usual. A bright flash, a pause in perception. Then I could feel the beating of my heart again. Next my body materialized and I flexed my muscles. Force of habit.</p>

Most have problems understanding the duality of heart and Keeper, especially when one is standing next to the other. Do you change between the body and the overview? Do you "zoom in" into your body? Stupid questions, asked by limited beings. Limited concepts brought about by thinking so rooted in convention they might as well be travelling on rails. Do they not have a heart themselves? Do they not have a body?

So does a Keeper. The Dungeon, the heart, the physical body, all are one. There is no point where one ends and the other begins, no need to switch perceptions. I see through my eyes, when I walk the streets of men, I sense my dungeon, my minions, my domain at the same time. I most certainly do not "zoom".

My last conquest had been satisfactory. A world full of enemies, with abilities similar to my own. They had dug down to challenge me, to rout my forces before I could establish myself, and had continued to fight until the demise of their very last king. I was almost sad to see it all end. But as always, new conquests awaited, and so the ritual of translocation had brought me to this new place.

This time the transfer had seemed a bit more ragged than usual. It happened, I knew. And despite the sadness inherent of seeing a campaign end and then having to start again from scratch, I also had been looking forward to this. The first phase of a conquest was always the most exhilarating. When your power was at its lowest, when you had no minions to defend you, save a handful of imps, when your Manapool was laughably small. You had to be careful. You had to be

sneaky. You never knew what world destiny had dropped you in, after all. Once, I remembered, I had awoken after translocation, my heart chamber filled with water. Without any trolls I could not hold back the tide with constructs, and with a dungeon filled with water, I could not attract any trolls. Not even Imps at first. It had taken me years to modify the spell to create them, so they would spawn with fins and gills instead of lungs, mainly because I had never paid much heed to the water live. I had had no idea how fish even breathed up to that point. When I had finally gathered the resources to build a portal, the count of drowned Imps must have been up there in the millions. And then I had attracted creatures I had never seen before. Waterbreathers, fish people, mermaids, sirens. The universe was a wondrous place.

Here however things seemed more straight forward. Expand, explore, exploit. When I had gathered what I needed, a place for my first portal had already been chosen and a few hours later, the crystal pillars formed out of the thick solution. Only then had things gone from "business as usual" to "very, very weird".

The portal had ignited, so far so good. Between the four crystal pillars, the darkness had formed, then shot down to crack the bedrock and open the way for creatures to traverse. No doubt some of my more intrepid minions from my last conquest would come through among the first. The riches I had left behind were always tempting and always meant that not much of your army remained, all of them going back to whatever world they hailed from, arms loaden with treasure. It was one of the reasons I liked to employ Dark elves. Their mind was skewed enough they took pleasure from combat situations, like others would from a drug high. Some of them always carried over.

But not this time. I had not awaited the first arrival. Instead I had gone back to expanding my dungeon. The usual shape for my capital took a long time to dig out and surveying the area was not always possible before your tunnel net had grown to a certain size. Not all places were suitable either. Once I had arrived next to a rift in between two tectonic plates, and had relocated my heart as soon as I possibly could. Water was one thing, but a chamber full of Magma was... unpleasant.

Again, the place here seemed usual enough. Dig outwards, scout ahead. Be careful, take your time. You needed the Mana and the metals anyways before you could do anything.

Then begin digging the circular hall around your heart. 500 meters wide, 80 meters high. Inner radius: 5 kilometres. The very base of my capital. Thousands of pillars would keep the hall from collapsing, the walls would serve as housing, while the large space itself would serve as marketplace, road, assembly hall even and by the time it was completed, I usually had the materials and the Mana to build any room, so to satisfy any creature's desire.

Only one problem. None were coming.

None. Even days after the portal had been established. The darkness wafted around peacefully in the pit, as if ready to please, only it didn't. I had the rooms. I had the requirements. Several times over by now. Even had the gold, having found a small vein by pure accident, not to mention the minute amounts one would acquire naturally just by sifting through thousands of cubic metres of

bedrock. And still my dungeon remained populated by Imps only.

This had never happened before, yet for the time being I remained calm. I was too old, too experienced to fall prey to panic. After a month and a half of no activity however, I decided to act.

More careful than ever before I began to scout the lower depths and the surface of the world. It was possible that this was not a coincidence. Maybe the natives were wary of my coming. Maybe they were blocking the portals somehow.

Another week later, that notion seemed very unlikely. There was nothing on the surface aside from trees and stones and the occasional sheep. So I expanded. Slowly. Following my usual pattern for the first hundred miles or so, I established more and more citadels, cylindrical holes deep underground, a hundred meters high, the walls of which would house thousands of creatures. Industrial districts surrounded them, together with barracks, laboratories, armories and pleasure districts. Never underestimate morale, especially not in a protracted campaign.

And still no creatures.

So I changed gear. Facing the very real possibility now, that I would have to face my enemies in person, I would need a lot of Mana. So I needed a lot of Mana Batteries. Those were expensive, but I was in luck as well. The new world featured trace elements of a metal I had never encountered before, that resonated with Magic an order of magnitude better than even platinum did. It would take awhile to amass enough of it for even a basic Mana Battery, but with the sheer amount of bedrock I was vaporising in the process of carving out my domain, I was bound to collect enough eventually...

* * *

><p>It has to be said...

While this is not the first story I have ever written, it is, in a way, the first of mine to be published. Certainly the first to be made available to this large a group of people.

I have chosen this one mainly because out of the lot, this one seems to be the most original. If there is a Dungeon Keeper Stargate crossover out there, I have yet to find it. I hope this will take me to interesting places within the show's universe, places that I have not explored before, and I hope I will be able to make the journey enjoyable to you.

2. Chapter 1 - 4X

CHAPTER 1 - 4X

After 3 months of constant exploring, expanding and exploiting, as well as a disturbing lack of exterminating, I was bored out of my skull. My vaults were filled to the brim with Gold, Silver and Platinum, the sheer amount of the lesser minerals I had found would enable me to equip legions of warriors with full weaponry and armour, if only I had someone to do the equipping. For now, bars of pure Iron, Aluminium, Cobalt, Chrome, Titanium, Vanadium, Mangan, Nickel,

Copper, Lead and others lay alongside the glass Jars containing Quicksilver and the airtight containers filled with all kinds of reactive Elements, waiting for someone to do something with them while constantly my Imps found more and more of everything. Even the more ethereal metals that eroded all life that touched it slowly found their way into my possession, isolated each in their own lead lined vaults, so as not to cause harm to my minions, should I ever find any.

In the last month alone I had come very close three times to calling it quits. Just pack up, screw this place and try again somewhere else. The ritual of translocation had brought me here and it would get me out of here just as well, this time to a place, hopefully, that wasn't as empty as a Goblin's head.

But, three times, I had fought the notion down, taking the experience as a lesson in patience instead. The reason for this was mainly that the situation was so utterly alien to me.

This had never happened before. Wherever the ritual had taken me, as far back as I could remember, there had been something or someone for me to conquer, be it sentient slugs, porcupine apes, hyper aggressive plants or, in one case, a singular, world encompassing organism. Now that had been a challenge.

Which meant there just had to be something here. I only had to find it.

In the meantime I was busying myself playing around with the new mineral my Imps had found. It was everywhere on this world, but in so minute quantities that any other method of mining than the "Keeper Method" would probably have overlooked it. As the little bead eyed monsters kept pulverizing the bedrock, any element of my choosing mysticized, swirling into my heart as green dust, to eventually be converted into minute amounts of Mana, while the rest condensed in their backpacks in bars or pellets, to be stored in the vaults. Earlier this month I had found several smaller veins of the new stuff, heavily localized, leading me to theorize they had fallen from the sky. It might as well have, as the material was interesting to say the least. One of the heaviest metals I had ever encountered, yet stable, it served as an energy sink for any and all forms of energy I had tested it with. It made for supreme lighting rod material too, not that I cared all that much. Instead, I did my best in trying to adapt my existing designs for Mana Batteries to the new material. The storage ability of such a device would be phenomenal. Although considering how much silver I had by now, I should probably have gone and used that insteadâ€¦..

My Imps had stopped following my usual pattern of building citadels underground every here and there. In fact, I had abandoned the practice of building anything by now. Instead, the majority my of workforce was kept busy by expanding my awareness the best way I knew of. They kept tunneling outwards in straight tunnels, several kilometres long, which would then end in a T-junction and serve as the basis for a new ring around my Dungeon Heart. The ring would spawn new straight tunnels, which would end in another ring, and so on, and so on, like the ever growing net of a spider, creeping along 500 metres below the surface and expanding my consciousness across the continent. I could see whatever went on above or below that net without much trouble and I was bound to find something this way

eventually.

Four of my little miners however had a more permanent assignment. They were digging in straight lines, forming the longest and most tactically unsound tunnels ever created by a Keeper, going in the four cardinal directions North, East, West and South. While the net thing would eventually work, if I didn't die of boredom before, my hope really lay with these four.

After four months on this new world, that hope was finally rewarded.

* * *

><p>The great continent the translocation ritual had landed me in sharpened into a rather sharp point in the east of my heart. The detection net had reached the ocean already on both sides, and both the northern and eastern long range Imp had been making their way along the coast racing ahead of it, hopefully to find a land bridge of some sort. They would, eventually, but before that the northern one ran into the largest Vein of the new material, I had dubbed it "Manastone" by now, I had yet encountered, a vein several Imps high containing more than 15 parts Manastone out of a hundred. This alone was enough to pique my interest and I dispatched a sizeable mining force immediately. But as the two explorers continued on their way, the density petered out again. So I sent a couple more to scout the area for better veins. Following the increasing amount of Manastone, I unknowingly made my way towards my prey.<p>

* * *

><p>"Humans! Now that is a welcome sight!"<p>

Humans were always fun. Adaptive, reasonably hard to kill, sometimes even inventive. Predominantly they were very much like sheep, following whoever bleated the loudest in masses, but the guys they followed made up for this more often than not. It was as if the charisma of the species naturally concentrated in a chosen few.

Only problem was, these ones didn't look like much of a challenge.

The mining party had found more Manastone, sure enough, and right in the middle of the area with the highest grade ore, they had found several small settlements surrounding a larger city. The settlements were all mining towns, apparently, and the large smoke columns rising up from the city suggested the presence of a lot of smelters in the city. I had no idea what they fired those smelters with, or how they would even get them hot enough to melt the material, but they apparently did. There was a singular road leading away from the city, which attracted my attention immediately, and every second day a small caravan of three ox driven carts would set out from the city along that road. Ready campsites in regular intervals suggested this to be a long honored practice, so I awaited ambushed one of the caravans during the night, waiting for midnight before I cast a sleeping spell on them, just to be sure, then I popped up to the surface for a quick personal visit. Their bars of Manastone were nowhere near as pure as the ones my Imps produced, but they were processed, allright. I was practically giddy at this point. Whatever they needed this much Manastone for I had no idea, or rather, I had

too many ideas. There could be an advanced magical society hiding just behind the horizon, quite literally. This was reasonably far away from my heart and apparently on the outskirts of whatever empire this was, so a nice opportunity to experiment. It was finally time to get to work.

* * *

><p>8 days later. Jaffa garrison of Bahal, office of the Garrison Commander

"Tell me again. From the beginning."

"From theâ€|. " A scornful look from his superior silenced the younger Jaffa midsentence.

"Begin with the attack on the first night."

"Yes, Master." The younger man sighed and Master Do'Urden sat back in his chair, fingers crossed, elbows on the armrests. He really had to commend his second for this fine piece of craftsmanship. He wondered where the man had gotten itâ€|

"I was not part of the night's watch the night it happened, but I woke soon enough, when the central square sunk into the ground along one of the refineries. I could not see it of course. By the time I reached a window, the wind had blown the dust almost half the way to the garrison."

That was a particularly uncomfortable detail of the whole affair. Lord Arihes was on planet, inspecting the various Naquadah refining shrines the gods had set up. Or had been on the planet. It wasn't exactly the nature of the gods to work until after sundown, understandable, Do'Urden thought, considering who her peers were, but on this rare occasion where one did, in that remote mining town, the one refinery she was currently visiting just happened to collapse into the ground. He found that rather suspicious. They were at peace with Aker though, were they not?

"..I did not see battle that first night thoughâ€|. " The younger man paused in his tale.

"I assume you talked to some who did, though?"

"Yes, Master. They told me about the demon."

"And the following day you fought thatâ€|. demonâ€| yourself?"

"Yes, Master."

"Tell me again."

"He appeared out of nowhere. Not in a flash of light, like with the rings, he simply came at us. His hands were burning and he threw balls of fire and lightning at us. They were unlike the magic of the gods master. The men who were hit by the fire actually burst into flames. I have never heard such screamsâ€|."

"Describe him to me."

"He was the tallest... man... I have ever seen. Yellow skin. Glowing eyes I think but I am not sure. The first night he was wearing something that looked like banded armour without a helmet, but that changed the next few times I saw him. The one time I saw him up close he was tearing a man's throat out with his teeth and I swear upon the sun they were as long as my fingers." He held his hand up here, doing something with his fingers to illustrate his point, but Do'Urden didn't look.

"You also found armor with claw marks, did you not?"

"They say they did, Master, but I never saw it myself. It might be a rumour."

Yeah, that was another problem. Good idea on the part of the master in charge at the time, keeping the more disturbing things under wrap, but unfortunately for Do'Urden, this young pup was the highest ranking survivor and not knowing stuff made his job that much harderâ€|..

"You said you shot him several times, yes?"

"Yes, Master. The Demon is resillient, but on the third night I am sure I was the one to land the killing blow."

"Exploding his head in the process, yes, I remember." The constant reminder was at this point getting rather annoying.

"Not my point anyway. You fought him several times and survived. He changed his armor, you say? Change how?"

"I don't know what he wore the first time, Master, but every time I saw him it seemed bigger. Bulkier. Thicker. He must be incredibly strong."

The gods never bothered with armor. There was of course the rumour that Horus himself fought alongside his troops, but even he probably wore that invisible shield Do'Urden had heard about instead. This one was different. Trying to match the magic of the gods with metal.

"So he had no defence against your weapons, then..."

"His armour didn't do him much good, Master. But he didn't seem to need it all that much. When my patrol encountered him that second night, we hit him with a full barrage. He went down, but then he came at us again, and I saw his flesh through the holes. It was unmarred."

Which didn't necessarily mean he was invulnerable. Why would he go down in the first place if he was? Why wear armour if he was?

"Five nights of combat. Four times you killed him. Maybe five, once more after you were sent away. We will likely never know. Are you certain it was the same man?"

"As certain as I can be, Master. The little demons he commanded looked all the same to me, but the demon himselfâ€| Yes, I think I recognized him. But that was no man. He was like a creature out of the legends."

Do'Urden raised one hand to forestall a possible expansion on the topic. He had heard it half a dozen times from half a dozen men, all survivors of the fight. An Unas, a demon sent by Sokar, Anubis first Prime himself, there were as many theories as there were surviving Jaffa. Not all of the men were quite as honorable as this one, who had been sent on horseback to warn him with a three man escort. Two more Jaffa had been picked up by the Death Glider flight Do'Urden had sent to check on Ileth the day after. All six had seen combat, all had given him valuable intel, but the last two would be executed the coming dawn for deserting their post. Facing an unkillable demon, or rather, one that returned from death every night, was no excuse to abandon your post.

"So, either we are facing a malevolent minor god, or simply an army of brothers. Very well. You can go. Be assured, your service will be rewarded."

"The only reward I ask for is to be part of whatever answer you have for this heresy, Master!"

"As you should."

They both bowed, then the younger Jaffa left Do'Urden alone with his thoughts. The Jaffa Master closed his eyes to organize his thoughts. 8 days ago this whole mess had begun in the town of Ileth. Nightly attacks on the outermost mining town under his purview. It had lasted four, possibly five nights, because when he had received word of it three days ago and sent a flight of gliders to support the garrison, it had all been over. Someone had fired at the gliders. Staff weapons in some of the higher buildings. The pilots had not seen their attackers but pulverized them regardless. Which could mean turncoats. But it was more likely their enemy had simply picked up the weapons.

He was also worried by the fact that the city had been empty. The Jaffa might have fallen, the two cowards excluded, but what about the human slaves? Between the city and the surrounding mining posts, there had to have been over three thousand of them there, men, women and children. He knew that, because as chief magistrate as well as Garrison commander, the food requisition went over his desk as well. Yet the only living souls the pilots had found were two Jaffa who had been too terrified to even speak at first. No escaped slaves, no families on the run, even the cages at the mines had been empty. So not only was he short 114 Jaffa and one minor God in the service of his Lord, but also thousands of humans.

Where had all the people gone?

Suddenly his thoughts were cut short as his desk began to shake. A second later, he heard an almighty rumble and the rest of his office joined in.

Sun aboveâ€|. .

* * *

><p>Collapsing the ground under someone was maybe a little of a cheap tactic, but it was always a fun one. Seriously though, what were these people, these Jaffa, thinking? Why would they not have underground fortifications? No scrying posts either, it seemed, the

Imps had not been contested in their careful probes, had apparently not been observed as they tunneled under the villages, the mining post and now this city, had seen no opposition whatsoever as they hollowed out large parts of the cities underground and prepared assault tunnels. As far as I was concerned, this was grossly negligent to a ridiculous degreeâ€|. <p>

Well, no matter, there was work to be done and I was itching to try out one of these fun little staffs. Getting hit with them had hurt like a bitch and that one time? I could not remember in all my years a time were I had lost consciousness so abruptly. Even a crossbow bolt to the forehead wouldn't have been able to oneshot me like one of these little beauties had. And I just loved the close combat potential. Might customize this one later maybe, assuming I survived the night without blacking out again. Add a blade at the hind end, probably.

I sent in the combat Imps first, once the rumbling had ceased, then strode in behind them, humming a tune. Four months of nothing and another two of preparing this â€" and it was already worth it.

* * *

><p>It has to be said...

**Digging speed**. Modern mining drills are huge machines that measure their speed in meters per day, I kid you not. Going by this, a four month journey would allow our intrepid Dungeon Keeper to create a tunnel of about 120 Meters in length. Now, seeing how the Imps in the game are quite a bit faster than this, excavating what looks like four square meters in about a second (make that 170 kilometres a day, which would take them halfway around the planet in four months and is a bit unrealistic. There are people that walk slower. Quite a lot of people actually.), I am nerfing the Dungeon Keeper somewhat by reducing the speed of his Imps to about 1 metre_per minute, putting the mining town at maybe 150 km distance from his heart. Now that might make all his complaints earlier seem like he is whining, but you have to keep into account how grave a threat_to a world a Dungeon Keeper actually is. Even at this speed, if one of those chaps appeared on earth tomorrow, I would not bet on mankind regarding the outcome. That is still 1440 times our digging speed, achieved by some ugly blokes with picks no less._ Versus the high tech machines we need for it, machines that are easily disabled and almost impossible to replace. You need the resources of a densely populated world to fight one of those guys, hence him being a little annoyed when all he found was a whole lot of nothing. _

**Just in case** anyone is wondering, no this will not turn into a D&D crossover. I am just notoriously bad at making up names and I have a soft spot for a certain Drow._

**Ari-Hes-Nefer** â€" Egyptian tutelary god, sometimes touted as a consort to Isis. By all accounts, a third rater â€" does not appear in Stargate canon._

**Aker** â€" Egyptian god of the earth, among other things â€" does not appear in Stargate canon._

"_**to mysticize" â€"**_ is not a word. In context of this story, however, it describes the process of turning solid matter into a

green, dustlike non-substance, as opposed to "to vaporize", which wouldn't be accurate here. Usually happens when you bash anything solid with an Imp-Pick._

3. Chapter 2 - Victory

Chapter 2 - Victory

Jaffa Master Do'Urden had served as the magistrate for the mining world of Bahal for almost fifty years by now. He had not neglected his daily training, far from it, but this night demonstrated to him once more how much he delighted in not having to take to the field of battle in person any more. Sure, he had a lot of Jaffa under his command, three entire Legions in fact, and nominally speaking, he was still fighting for his Lord and God. But the vast majority of Jaffa on this world were only stationed here to discourage invasion â€“ both here and elsewhere â€“ not actually fight it off. There was a lot of Naqudah in the ground, on this continent at least. With three Legions encamped all around the city which held the Chappa'ai, any attempt to seize it would be short lived, while the warriors could also be swiftly dispatched to any other fringe world â€“ just in case the neighbours got a little antsy. Neighbours who knew about this and thus nobody had actually tried, not in living memory. He had enjoyed the mostly clerical duties of his office. They had come with a comfortable office, a large house, plenty of slaves for him and his family. He had even been blessed with an all seeing eye, a communication stone the size of his fist. It looked like a rather huge pearl and though it rested, most of the time, in a shrine in his office, he had always revelled in the fact that he was one of maybe a handful of Jaffa Masters that could boast of such an honour.

And now thisâ€¦..

After fifty years, he was once again knee deep in blood. Surrounded by screams and explosions, by collapsing towers and burning buildings. And to top it all off, it was his city that was burning.

"Master Do'Urden, runner from the east district. The Axe Demons are carrying off the slaves." He nodded at the young Jaffa whose name he didn't know.

"Send him back with this: They are to continue the manoeuvre. If they can do that and cut off the demons, they are welcome to rescue the slaves, but our first priority is containment." The young man repeated the message, bowed, then left.

That was one thing the survivors hadn't reported, but it certainly fit the bill. Where else could the slaves have gone but into whatever infernal underworld that had spawned these creatures. He couldn't care less, humans bred like rabbits anyway. He was more concerned about possible Jaffa prisoners that might also be down there, at the bottom of that pit they had dug in the middle of his city â€“ and of course, seeing how they had not yet found Lady Arihes, there might also be one captive, very pissed off minor god down there.

The name for their attackers, "Axe Demons", had come out of nowhere and had stuck immediately. The ugly little blighters with their war axes were less than half the height of a Jaffa, wore heavy armour

that mainly covered their shoulders and upper chest, and reinforced, open helmets. Sensible. You could only strike at them from above anyway and while the shoulder plates would prevent them from using overhead strikes themselves, they seemed to prefer going for ankles and knees anyway. Already Do'Urden had seen a dozen Jaffa that would never walk again, miracles notwithstanding.

According to what he could tell, they were trying the same tactic they had used on Ileth. Appear in the middle of the night by collapsing part of the city, however the hell they had done that, then spread out from the crater and wear down the garrison by means of attrition. He had seen one warband himself so far. They were small, they were fast they were fearless and while they fought like absolute amateurs, their numbers seemed to be without end. Fifteen had charged his retinue, two had made it to the firing line, only one had managed to bring his blade to bear. But then, out of a nearby building, had come another fifteen, who must have been lying in wait. To those he had lost three warriors before they could be cut down. As his warriors advanced through the city, more and more reported constant engagements as they went. This all seemed very similar to the reports he had been hearing all day indeed.

Thus Do'Urden had decided on containment first, fighting later. The city Garrison had spread out in two directions, like a reverse wedge and had begun to encroach on the giant hole that seemed to be the source of the demons, with two flights of gliders for fire support. He had urged the pilots to not go overboard, however. He wanted to retake the city, not burn it to the ground, and those flyboys tended to get a little trigger happy...

Once they held the edge, they would encircle the hole, sweep the city for any leftover demons, then press forward, down into the depths, to strike at the root of the problem. And if that yellow demon was indeed down there somewhere, they would then put his so called immortality to the test.

"Master, Falcon flight reports, they believe they have sighted the Yellow Demon."

What do you know. Speak of theâ€| well, devilâ€|.

"Is it really him?"

"The pilots say he wields a staff weapon and commands a swarm of Axe Demons."

Safe bet then. "Where?"

"Third district, Master, three streets away from the armoury."

Do'Urden smiled. That would be a rather short incarnation then.

* * *

><p>I watched with glee as another hit from my pilfered staff sent yet another Jaffa spinning. I had learned from the previous engagements of course. Jaffa always operated in teams of 6 or greater. They liked to form firing lines and fire in volleys. I had also tested their fire staff on my firing range extensively. Hitting

something man sized at more than 70 metres was all but impossible, but in the close quarters of a cityfight that wouldn't be a problem. Neither for me, nor for them, of course. And the blast was really quite powerful. I had learned first hand what it felt like getting hit with one of those. Provided it didn't fling you all over the place, it still disoriented you long enough for the other five in the squad to take aim and once they managed to do that it was quite simply over. On the fourth night in XXX one squad had been particularly inventive. Instead of volleying their staffs, they had fired at me in sequence and bounced me around for a good minute before my healing factor finally couldn't keep up with the trauma anymore. When I had wrapped it up the next night, I had gone through all the captives to find three of those six still kicking. They were alive still, and would remain so for quite a while, although they probably wished they had perished by now.<p>

I ducked behind a corner, then conjured an illusion to draw their fire and while they were shooting at my shadow, I took careful aim, then squeezed with my thumb. Seeing my target's right arm fly away in one direction and the rest of him in another after I hit him in the shoulder brought a grin to my face. This was strangely cathartic. Less strenuous than a bow, higher rate of fire than a crossbow. Just as destructive as spell casting, but nowhere near as mentally taxing. Just point and press the button. And as the remaining four turned to return the favor I directed a mob of combat Imps into their backs, then left my cover just in time to see them hack the Jaffa to pieces.

My losses were already horrendous, easily 8 Imps for every Jaffa taken out, and the ratio kept climbing. There were a lot more Jaffa in this city than there had been in the last, and they tended to stick together now. But I had learned here as well. Combat Imps were created through a variation of the normal "Create Imp" spell, which gave them armour and replaced their pick with a similarly enchanted battleaxe that would cut through almost anything, but was in turn very, very bad at digging. That was pretty much the only alteration I had made to the spell though, hence they still pretty much behaved like normal Imps, and were thus pretty awful fighters. I had just never seen a reason to develop the spell any further. Why bother?

So every swarm of combat Imps had one or two normal ones attached to them, allowing them to move not only through the streets, but through walls as well, which had worked in my favor quite well so far.

Then I heard the screeching of another of those flying machines as it passed overhead. I had seen what they could do to unmoving towers and had no desire to test how good they were at aiming, so I made for the nearest alley. And not too soon. Behind me, my current Imp swarm exploded in yellow fire as the screeching intensified. No matter. The new Mana Batteries were still a long way off, but I had created enough common ones by now that I could keep summoning Imps all night. I liked their "Naquada" a lot better than my "Manastone" though. Had a certain ring to itâ€¦.

I turned left at the next junction, on behalf of there being movement in the air on the right, then right again to avoid a rather large concentration of Jaffa two blocks ahead. By now a freshly summoned Imp swarm had caught up, and I strode along the road rather confidently again, when I suddenly heard a very familiar shout.

"Jaffa! Kree!"

A second later it became painfully obvious I had walked into a trap, when two dozen Jaffa appeared in windows, doors and from alleyways. And they had something new with them, too. 4 little groups, 3 Jaffa each, were each manhandling something into position that looked remarkably familiar.

"Oh! Are those larger versions of the fire staffs?"

I saw one particularly smug looking Jaffa raise his hand, then there was a very loud sound, a very bright light â€“ and the next thing I knew I was in my heart chamber again. Damnit!

* * *

><p>Next day, around midday, Garrison of Bahal

Do'Urden looked down from the roof of the garrison on what was left of his city and sighed. He was sitting on the slanted roof, his staff leaned against his shoulder, his elbows resting on his knees, as he reviewed the damage the fight had done, visible in all its glory now.

Repeated passes of Death Gliders had cleared the air above Bahal again. At first, the pilots had been wary of the order, low passes to them sounded like a good way to get shot. But no one had taken the opportunity and so they had taken to cloud duty with enthusiasm. Less enthusiasm than the slaves had shown while they tried saving their houses from the fires, but still...

The fires had all been put out by now, that was something at least. The barracks sickbay was full, so full infact that they had to branch the warriors out into their own rooms. Not that big of a deal, really. The axe demons hadnt left all that many in critical condition, the wounded were the result of singular Jaffa missing their shots when a swarm charged them, then missing a melee attack when the demons got close, resulting in one very nasty axewound, usually in the leg. If a line got overwhelmed, things were very different, so far they had not found any survivors wherever that had happened. The Axe Demons were lousy fighters, and apparently sought to make up for it through sheer voracity. In some cases the only way of counting the dead had been to count the staff weapons instead. Do'Urden shuddered. It had been awhile wince he had seen such savagery.

Of his three thousand Jaffa, 150 were wounded as such, 110 of those would never walk again, the sun's blessing to the rest, and 200 more were with the gods now.

200! 350 casualties in a single night, sun above... and yet that wasn't the worst of it. Lady Arihes was still missing, and of course the damn Stargate, which had stood in the central square, was now buried in rubble down at the bottom of that blasted hole! He had put the slaves to work as soon as all the Axe Demons had spontaneously exploded all over the city, an occurrence that signalled the fall of their master, as he knew from the reports of Ileth's Jaffa.

Do'Urden furrowed his brows. He was basing his entire strategy on those reports, and it rubbed him the wrong way. They were under attack by an enemy he had never faced before, worse, an enemy he had never heard of before. His second in command, Ullach of Hebron, had all but confirmed both the description and the toughness of the yellow demon. The creature had been almost two meters tall, armoured, yellow skinned, although Ullach had used the word "scaled" and remarkably, had still been in recognizable pieces after Ullach's Jaffa had hit him with a full 4 staff cannon volley. A Jaffa or a human would have been paste on the next wall. Still, they knew far too few about this enemy.

He had reported all that they knew, and the absence of Lord Arihes via the eye to Lord Gheb, who ruled all rimward fringeworlds in the name of Ra. After a lot of shouting, his orders were now what he could have guessed beforehand: Get the Stargate operational again, free Lord Arihes and crucify this intruder. Whether Lord Gheb had confidence in his leadership or in the sheer numbers under his command, Do'Urden had no clue, but there was this slight nagging in his skull. The voice of doubt, he recognized it from his formative years, which told him that if the Chappa'ai had been operational, his head might be sitting on a spike right now and Ullach would be magistrate...

Do'Urden looked at the oxen being chained to the ring of the gods which had finally been found an hour ago. The slope was rather steep and the ring rather heavy, but they did have a lot of oxen. Hopefully they would at least get it out of the hole before sundown. Then he could defeat the next attack, which would come sometime this night and erect the Ring somewhere outside the gates first thing tomorrow. With a victory to report that would be the better time to reestablish contact.

Technically, last night had been a victory too, of course. They had driven the demons back, the city was still his. But with Ileth lost, a giant crater in the middle of Bahal and the Chappa'ai buried, thus cutting the world off from the rest of his Lord's realm he could see why Lord Gheb didn't really agree. Well, no use brooding up here. He could see the work teams and he could see some of his warriors down there, but they all looked like ants from up high. And of course he couldn't see those who had ventured into the tunnels at all...

* * *

><p>"Master. Tek'ma'te!"</p>

"Ullach. What are you still doing down here? I ordered you to get some hours of sleep. By all accounts it will be another long night."

"Forgiveness, Master, I meant no disrespect. I have handed over the reigns to my second an hour ago. I was justâ€|. Hoping to hold on a bit longer, so I could bring you some good news after all."

Do'Urden's face sank. He had half expected itâ€|

"Well then, out with it, Jaffa! What news do you have for me?"

Ullach turned around to point out the entrypoints into the tunnelsystem. They were easy to spot, with guards stationed at every one.

"The tunnels areâ€|. difficult to traverse. They are devoid of activity so far, but I doubt we will get anywhere before sunset..."

"Difficult how?"

"They are hewn into the bedrock. Quite crudely it seems. The walls are uneven, the ceiling is barrel shaped, if barely. They are alsoâ€|.. very narrowâ€|. And not very high."

As Do'Urden raised an eyebrow, Ullach held his hands a meter apart, then held his left hand out horizontally â€" at about belly height. The magistrate couldn't help but groan at the sight. He should have known. In hindsight, he really should have expected it. Why would the Axe Demons bury here all the way from whence they came and provide the Jaffa with nice, large tunnels to follow them back to their lairs? A tunnel this high on the other hand would give the diminutive creatures room enough to stand up straight in, but would force a Jaffa to crouch, greatly slowing any attempt at counter attack.

But wait a second.

"How many exit tunnels have you found?"

"Eight, Master. They lead away from the crater in a star pattern."

"That is not a lot. And those are all as small as you described?" Ullach nodded. How the hell did they squeeze an entire army through those tunnels? And how did they carry away all the earth they excavated?

"We have found a number of rooms a little further out. Those were much bigger, higher for once, and didn't look nearly as crude. I suspect there is a network beneath our feet, but I would need more time to fully map it. One thing though, Master."

"Hm?"

"The floor, Master. Both in the tunnels and in the larger rooms. It looksâ€| gorgeous. A finely chiseled pattern, embedded in an obsidian plate, inlaid with lighter materials. It repeats in varying means and colours, appears in different sizes, paints patterns of its own. Especially in the big rooms, it is really quite a sight to see..."

"I dread your conclusion to this, Ullachâ€| Out with it! What is your point?"

"I have rarely seen such artwork, Master. It must have taken very long to set up. I do not understand why one would put so much work into a forward base, but this has to be the work of many months. And who knows how long the tunnels are. The demons have been among us for a whileâ€|."

* * *

><p>Heart of the Dungeon, the moment of sunset...

I stepped away from the Dungeon Heart and blinked a few times. That had been rather bright.

Then I summoned a new Imp, cast "Possession" and once I was inside the creature, made haste to reach the more than three hundred kilometre distant city I was besieging. For the fifth time since I had started this campaign! By now the voyage was getting rather boring, maybe it was time to begin taking this seriously.

While I raced towards conquest, I surveyed what had happened in the meantime. Felt through my dungeon, scryed outside for additional information. When the Jaffa had knocked me out, it had still been several ours before dawn, and now it was of course the next evening. Which meant while I had been out cold the Jaffa had had more than half a day to fortify, to repair, to organize, and it would been several hours still before I could personally reach the city again. Maybe they had even tried to strike back. With the manpower the city had it was certainly possible.

The only good thing about the additional delay of this journey on Imp foot was that it would give me time to regain some of the Mana I had spent the other night. When my consciousness had flickered out, all the Imps had died â€“ again â€“ and while my reserves were still substantial one could never have too much Mana. I summoned more and more Imps while I ran, mostly workers for now, to get my mining operations under way again and to resume the expansion of the dungeon. Definitely time to get serious. I had easily lost hundreds of workers last night. Setting this up yet again and telling them what to do â€“ yet again â€“ was getting tedious.

Next up was intel gathering. Carefully I scryed further out, first along the edges of the city, still wary of possible countermeasures. Surely now that they knew they were under attack someone would break out the feedback spells. How likely was it that there was not a single warlock in that city? Oh, that reminded me. Aside from the road that had led me to it there were two more roads leading to that big city, or rather, away from it. Both had a tunnel underneath by now and Imps digging along. I had almost forgotten to resummon those.

No, still no anti-scrying spells. How very unusual. The Jaffa had taken up position on top of the ridge, just like their comrades in Ileth had. I could see wooden palisades being erected, which of course wouldn't really do much, and I could see more of those big staff weapons, surrounded by â€“ what was that? Sacks filled withâ€ Sand. Interesting idea. Certainly better than bricks. Just as good at lightning deflection and yet they wouldn't shatter and shower the gunners with shrapnel, if struck by something moreâ€ explosive. I had to remember this..

What else?

The crater itself looked markably different, didn't it? A track of long, cylindrical depressions led from a large pile of rubble, down in the crater, up all the way to the top of the slope. As if something very heavy had pressed something into the ground. I knew these kind of marks. It was typically a way of transporting something

very heavy, that didn't require building a cart for it. Just drop some wooden beams in front, push or pull whatever "it" was along, then drop some more wooden beams. He had seen a lot of oxen in the city, certainly, but what had theyâ€|.?

I followed the tracks as they changed when entering the city. The roads were paved here but caravans such as this usually changed a place. They made a lot of dirt and they needed a lot of space, so stuff had to be moved away in front of them. Ah, there. That ring sculpture maybe? It sat just outside the city gates, flat on the ground, with a large pen of the horned pack animals nearby. This was perplexingâ€|..

I focused some more of my power on the ring. It was heavy, made mostly from Manastâ€| from Naquadah, apparently. There were some crystals growing inside it, it seemed but otherwise the thing was almost completely solid.

It must have taken a lot of manpower to get this thing from the bottom of the crater up to here. Truth be told, they had a lot of that. I had squeezed, quite literally, some intel out of my captives from Ileth by now and thus knew that every human on this world was either a fugitive or a slave, while everyone who wore armour was likely a Jaffa and thus a slave master. This city had a lot of Jaffa, but the number of humans was oh so much greater.

Still. There were other things they could have been doing with this manpower than dig out a large metal ring that I hadn't even consciously tried to bury. It had just had the misfortune of standing in the middle of the city, I faintly recalled seeing it stand there, upright on a pedestalâ€|

For some reason this had been just as important to them as preparing for siege. I filed this away under "interesting" as well. Then I got back to surveying the battle line and directing my Imps to undermine it.

They hadn't blocked the tunnel ends up, but there were small spheres littering all exit tunnels. So they had ventured into the tunnels during my unconsciousness. Apparently not very far though, the vaults and the workshop were still fine. Good. Without my Trolls I had no doors to properly secure my Dungeon. I could have made some myself, of course, but I really was no carpenter. Now, Alchemy, that was more my thing. Speaking of which, the spheres were possibly mines of some sort or at the very least traps of some description. Well, this was going to cost me a lot of Mana in any case, no reason to get squeamishâ€|

What about the prison? Still there and still empty. The only measure of defence he currently had during the day had been the large distance the Jaffa would have to crawl through narrow tunnels with a very low hanging ceiling, but unfortunately that also meant I hadn't managed to herd any prisoners back there yesterday before all my Imps exploded. Well, this night would be different. Play time was over.

Time to start summoning Combat Imps as well, I thought, while my personal transport sprinted along through the darkness.

><p>City of Bahal, three hours past midnight

Vatir of Hebron was itching for a fight, as he led his warriors through the nightly streets of Bahal. His rank had allowed him to claim control over one of the patrols combing the city, and his legend had grown to the point already that he had been allowed to choose the five Jaffa in his squad himself. As it should be. After all, had it not been him who killed the Yellow Demon? Oh, sure, he had come back for more, but he had killed him.

He had spent a good few hours with the Magistrate again today, advising Master Do'Urden on the best strategy for this night. The first attack yesterday had come shortly after sundown, much like the first night in Ileth, when the ground had collapsed under them. But Vatir had assured the old man that the following attacks would not come before much later in the night. For some reason the Demon feared the light of the sun, yes, as he only ever fought in the absence of it. But never again had he attacked so short a time after sunset. Vatir suspected it had something to do with his resurrection process. A lot of the legends, like the one about Osiris, mentioned the gods sleeping for a night before rising again, maybe it was similar for demons.

Still, this was pushing it. The time had passed, the demon was taking his sweet time this night, hence Vatir's growing impatience. Then he heard the sound " and grinned.

"That was a Staff Cannon! Jaffa! Kree!" 6 staff weapons snapped forward, their covers retracted as the weapons charged. More and more Cannon discharges could be heard in the distance now and Vatir saw the flashes of light against the star spangled sky.

"Stay away from windows and doors! Remember, you only get two chances. You either shoot them while they charge or bash them when they reach you. Miss both and you can explain your failure to Anubis!"

The Jaffa formed a wedge in front of him, then they resumed the patrol. Vatir would have preferred to take command of one of the cannons, but the magistrate had thought his experience would serve better in this position, guarding his fellow warriors' backs. He hoped the old man would not regret this decision, but he would fight as stalwart here as he would in any other position. And who knew what the fates would bring.

* * *

><p>Do'Urden surveyed the battle from on top one of several wooden towers that had been erected behind the battle line. So far, so good. The little demons had returned, they had triggered the stun bombs his Jaffa had left behind, the light had been easy to see as it shone out the tunnels, illuminating the crater. That had been an hour ago, and his warriors were still shooting their advance to pieces. Every tunnel exit had a cannon aimed at it, the terrain in front of each was deeply cratered by now, and would be painted in demon guts, if those creatures didn't evaporate on death. Thank the gods for small favours, he thought.</p>

Do'Urden was worried about one of the eastern positions, they were

positioned at a rather steep slope. So far the underground had held under the repeated stresses of cannon discharges and he hoped it would for the rest of the night. Regardless of their losses, the Demons kept coming. They shot our of the tunnels in waves, as unending as the sea itself it seemed, no matter how many of them died. Hardly any of them made it to high enough up the slope for the Jaffa guarding the ridge to even shoot at them, but every now and again they did, and his Jaffa had already suffered casualties again. Only once had Do'Urden heard of an enemy this stalwart, in the old legends concerning Anubis himself. Legend had it, his warriors were more scared of him than they were of death in battle. As the old stories went, they marched even into the hottest of fires, they died in droves, they never retreated.

Ultimately, they all died, along with their god. So there was that.

A young Jaffa climbed the latter to the command post. Do'Urden listened to what he had to say, then apparently found it worth relaying. "Runner from East District, Master."

Oh, he had a bad feeling about this. East district was becoming a synonym for bad news lately.

"Their patrols have encountered Axe Demons."

Yeah. East district, alright. He wouldn't be buying anything over there again any time soonâ€¦

"There has to be a breach in our defences. Send runners to all district commanders. Warn them and tell them: I want to know how and where they made their way into the city proper."

"At once Mast..."

Do'Urden felt it before he could see it. A rumbling shook the tower, not unlike the one he had felt yesterday, if less intense. The tower vibrated, then shook, then wavered â€" then Do'Urden acted on instinct, jumping out of the wooden edifice, no matter that he was four metres above the ground. He hit the pavement painfully and felt the very road crumble under his grasping hands. His staff forgotten, he struggled to make it forward, metre by metre, but the house behind the command post, in a mockery of his efforts, seemed to drift farther and farther away with each fraction of a second.

"I was a fool..." were his last waking thoughts before the earth took him.

* * *

><p>"Forward, you dogs! Don't falter against those wretched demons!" Vatir fired his staff from his support position behind his men, killing a demon that had made it past the volley of his squad. It was a time honoured position. It highlighted the skill of the leader, being able to shoot his enemies without hitting his own warriors, and it gave him the oversight he needed to control the flow of the battle.<p>

"Forward I say! Chase them back into the underworld! And I will give a good beating to whoever shoots the least of them, tomorrow!"

It was the third wave of the demons they had driven back, which meant there was a fourth nearby. They always came in two groups. One attacked openly, the other sought to ambush in their wake. Only problem was, there was a T-Junction ahead.

"You three! Turn left up ahead! The rest of us, turn right! On my command, charge, clear the junction, stand in the middle of the road! Kree!"

And they charged. The last three demons fell to their volleys, than, as if possessed of one mind, the six Jaffa reached their positions and turned, Staffs leveled.

"Oh, Sokar's Ballsâ€|. "

These were not fifteen. More like fifteen waves, maybe. Vatir saw firelight reflected on their unearthly sharp axes, saw their beady eyes glint in the night. Dozens of them, surely, on each side of the road. Before he could even give the order to fall back, he saw even more breaking through the wall of the building they had just passed â€" blocking their retreat. Surrounded on all sides. Hundreds of enemies. Well, they would need that many to bring him down!

"Jaffa! Give them no quarter!"

* * *

><p>Underneath Bahal

Few of my minions ever saw my heart. It was after all the lynchpin of my very existence. Not exactly fragile, but even a slightly damaged heart would play merry hell with Mana extraction. And besides, why take the risk.

Few of those who had seen it, had ever understood the nature of my heart. Especially amongst the warlocks the idea had persisted that one could craft a heart somehow and attach it to one's lifeforce. To my knowledge no one ever suspected that they had it completely backwards.

The heart was not an organ. The humanoid body was. This thing of muscle and nerves bones that allowed me to walk around like the man I was not, it was an addition, a bonus. The heart on the other hand. That. That was me.

The heart.

And the floor and the walls.

The rooms, the furniture, the coins and pellets in the vaults.

The entirety of the dungeon was my body, with the Imps very much akin to my blood.

Still, there was some truth to it. The heart was a focal point. And with it a few hundred kilometres away from the battle came certain disadvantages for which to invalidate a body came in rather handy.

I felt my Imps more clearly, saw what they saw more vividly, could

issue commands more precisely as I floated in the sanctity of the ritual chamber, deep below the city. I felt the Mana course through me as I directed my army of incompetent cannon fodder against the elite surface dwellers.

I had hoped they would eventually run out of ammunition for those infernal weapons so I could eventually overrun them, but as the hours crept on and my secondary preparations neared completion, I had to conclude that this idea had to be abandoned. Whatever those things were, they didn't even have to be reloaded, apparently. Well, they had been shooting at shadows for the most part anyway. Conjuring up illusions, movement, pictures was far less Mana intensive than having to constantly replace Imps. The occasional real wave was among them, and they made it to the top regularly, just to keep the warriors on their toes. The real fight they had already lost.

With no counterspells in place, I had been able to keep an evil eye on all their patrols, find their command posts, bury towards their armoury. I had added an extra, secret basement to the last and filled it with gunpowder, though I hoped I wouldn't need to blow it up. I was oh so eager to take the contraptions apart.

"Nowâ€| go forthâ€|."

And with that, my warriors emerged in the city, just as the enemy's leaders were swallowed by the very earth they thought solid. Imps broke through basement walls, opened up staircases and carved ramps into the land, leading from the underground to the surface so my real army could march while the last combat Imps distracted the patrols. In front of the city gates, the ground collapsed into new craters, the slopes of which were quickly steepened by the work crews until not even they could scale them anymore. I could not have them all running away once they realized. I needed to test these new troops...

* * *

><p>Ullach of Hebron was having a really bad night. He had but barely survived his command tower breaking apart under him, only to then see one emplaced cannon after the other erupt in explosions that he couldn't make out the cause for. He ordered the two glider flights to strafe the crater in order to keep the enemy contained, but shortly after, runners started coming in, from from north and west districts at first, then from east and south, which should have gone to master Do'Urden if he was still alive instead. His patrols were engaged, all of them, it seemed. Shortly after, the reserve reported they had engaged additional demons around the armoury but were holding them at bay, giving Ullach hope that all was not as bad as it had at first seemed â€" and then the gliders had started exploding.</p>

Plasma bolts from their own weapons, fired in sequence, streaked skywards from various buildings, making the source rather easy to identify. The pilots struck back, pulverizing the buildings in question and before long Ullach knew he would have to assign firecrews again if he didn't want to preside over a pile of ash come the morrow.

But nothing of this even remotely prepared him for the sight that came next.

* * *

><p>"We have lost containment." Ullach addressed the twenty something young Jaffa before them. Officially, they were not yet warriors, they were too young. Inofficially, having his runners traverse a demon infested city at night unarmed would have been tremendously stupid, so they each had been issued Zat'niki'tels.</p>

"Find your commanders. Have them recall their patrols. At this point our only chance is to stand united. We will regroup next to the armoury and push outwards from there."

That place at least was still secure. With more than 1500 Jaffa entrenched in the armoury, the nearby barracks and the surrounding city block, the Demons had not found any purchase there.

"Now, go. Run as fast as you can, it will likely be your last message for the night." And the youths sprinted. Ullach was about to issue the command to his own troops to begin a fighting withdrawal from the edge, when a horn sounded from his northern flank, asking for immediate assistance.

Pulling his warriors in as he passed them, he marched towards the northern edge of his fortifications.

Then he saw them.

"Almighty sunâ€|. "

He had no idea who had said it, but it coalesced more expressions out of the others. He could not blame them. Had he been wearing an eye, he would have clutched it as well.

Before him the street opened up into the square in front of the northern gate. The street itself had been barricaded, the barricades had been manned. A single Staff cannon had rested on a wooden pedestal to fire in support.

All of this was now swarmed by abominations far worse than even the bug eyed demons.

White as snow were they. Wearing the armour and weapons they had wielded in life. Flesh stripped of the bones they strode amongst the fortifications. Shooting, tearing, searching. The barricades were burning, and Ullach saw the last defender go down, firing his Zat'niki'tel repeatedly at one of the warriors, who only grinned at him as he ripped him apart, blue lightning playing over his armour. Grinned in a way that only a fleshless skull could. As theâ€| thing turned to Ullach, the stout Jaffa felt his knees wavering. Unholy burned in the eyes of what had once been a proud Jaffa. Red pinpricks of light focussed on him, then the thing grabbed the Weapon of the warrior it had just dismembered. With an ear piercing scream theâ€|. Skeletonâ€| charged his battle line, raising it's arm to aim. Before it could fire, his warriors opened up, lifelong training kicking in, lighting the attacker up. Every hit made the creature stagger â€" but it kept coming. Every shot burned away armour â€" but it kept coming. For every time it squeezed the trigger, it took ten hits of its own â€" but it kept coming. It lost the weapon arm, most of the rib cage, then the left leg. The armour was in tatters, the spine snapped, the hipbone pulverized â€" but it kept coming, crawling towards them with

the one remaining arm, screaming all the way. Tearing at their souls. Only when a shot hit home on it's head, finally shattering the skull, did the thing stop moving.

Unfortunately, it was not alone. More and more of the abominations appeared out of doors and alleyways. Some pearl white, some missing limbs, some wearing already blackened armour. And when they all screamed in unison, Ullach of Hebron, Jaffa Warrior of Ra, survivor of 40 years of fringeworld warfare, veteran of three coreworld campaigns â€“ soiled his armour, dropped his weaponsâ€| and ran.

* * *

><p>It has to be said...

Ma'tok staff potency â€“ I am aware that the 1994 movie "Stargate", while serving as the basis for the Stargate franchise we all know and love, was not made by the same people that made said series. Roland Emmerich has gone on record saying that he isn't particularly fond of the current continuity that has arisen from his work and is apparently trying to start his own. According to Wikipedia, a new trilogy of movies is in the planning stages, which might or might not establish its own canon._

Still, the Jaffa weaponry in the movie was quite a bit more powerful than what we see in the series and I honestly like it better that way. In the Stargate SG1 pilot episode the staffs were still macho enough to bust the protagonists out of a solid stone building, but somehow they got progressively weaker as the series went on, until they had hardly any impact anymore. Similarly, the competence of the Jaffa gradually went from

"Feared-Warriors-that-trained-really-hard-all-their-lifes", to "Idiots-who-had-to-be-shown-how-it's-done-by-upstart-earthers". Keep in mind both that Teal'c regularly kicks the crap out of pretty much anyone and that even the youngest Jaffa warrior present in that "P90s are better than Staffs" episode might very well have been older than O'Neill. SO much wasted potentialâ€|

Geb â€“ Egyptian god of the earth (yes, another one). Father to Osiris and Isis, who I didn't know were siblings before writing this. Kinky._

A Keeper's Avatar â€“ I might have to rewrite this somewhat. In case it didn't become clear in the story: A Dungeon Keeper has both a Dungeon, a Dungeon Heart, and a humanoid body walking around. The only way to kill him, however, is to shatter the Heart, as the walking body, the "Avatar", so to say, isn't really a living thing. (this is my own addition to the franchise, btw, it has no basis in the games). Still, if the body is destroyed, "killed" so to say, the backlash forces the Keeper into a sort of coma that lasts unto the next sunset, at which time a new body is spontaneously generated in the heart chamber._

Skeletons â€“ They were kinda useless in the game, weren't theyâ€|_

4. Chapter 3 - Questions and Answers

****Chapter 3 â€“ Questions and Answers****

I spared the new prison complex just the barest part of my attention while tending to my myriad other chores throughout my growing domain. Breaking a garrison was, after all, only the beginning of a conquest. The skeletal warriors, undead remains of both citizens and slave keepers of Ileth, had served me well in that regard, as I had expected. In my experience, most people reacted ratherâ€| extreme when they first happened upon the living dead trying to chew their face off and they had won me many a battle in the past through their effect on morale alone. Although, armed with the firestaffs, I could see their importance in my army increase. Just point and shoot, just like their twisted, simplistic minds liked it.

With the Jaffa Warriors routed, their remains captured and corralled by normal Imps into the now enlarged tunnels, the captives disrobed, once they reached the prison complex, then were channelled into the cells proper, reminded by one of their numbers, nailed upside down to the wall, that I brooked no opposition at this point. In a few days, some of them would be sent back to the surface to help sort through whatever loot could be found, but for now I wanted the thought of them being prisoners to sink in.

And in a few more day, most of them would follow the path tread by their kin from Ileth, flesh stripped from their bones to take up arms again and join my growing army.

That left the humans to deal withâ€|

* * *

><p>Malek the scribe had seen things in the service of the gods. He had learned that the Jaffa were murderous assholes, most of them anyway, he had learned that your chances of daily survival were best when you didn't give them any lip, he had learned to anticipate their wills and whims and to evade their anger whenever possible. In short, he had learned to bend over and take it.</p>

He saw no shame in this. It had allowed him to stay alive, to take a wife, to father two lovely children. He slaved away from sunrise to sunset, organizing their city for them and had barely any time for his family, but then again, that was the fate of a man, wasn't it? They all did their part, did what they had to in order to survive, did what the gods commanded.

Well, apparently that would change nowâ€|.

When the ground had collapsed one nights ago, when the screaming and the shooting and the.. dying had started, Malek had first seen one of the "Axe Demons". A swarm of them actually. His family had been huddled together against the back wall of their one room abode, while he had barred the door windows and watched for anyone coming for them. The children had been grumpy at first, from being woken in the night, then curious for that was a babes nature. Then of course, their parents obvious fear had seeped into their little minds and eventually, the crying had started. The wall to the neighbouring house breaking open had not helped in this regard, neither had the horde of little monsters coming through. The door closed, their only escape rout blocked by his own hands, they had pressed their children into a corner of the room, guarding them with what little armour their own bodies would afford them â€" but the little, beady eyed

things had apparently been otherwise inclined. The one with the pick had run straight through his house, opened up the opposing wall with a few, precise strikes, then disappeared in the hole framed with green dust. His armed and armoured companions had followed in his path as he disappeared in the hole, eliciting a scream a second later, from whoever they had spooked now.

The next day had been unusual. Hectic. It had reminded him of a campaign he had helped prepare once. He had prayed to the sun though that he wouldn't be on the loosening side. That this, exactly this, wouldn't happen. That he wouldn't be pulled and pushed through the streets, away from his house, towards an uncertain though probably violent future.

When the shooting had died down again, he had hoped the Jaffa had won the day once more, a hope quickly dashed when another swarm of demons, this time accompanied by a walking skeleton of all things, had invaded his home. The creature had pulled him out on the streets, with its one remaining arm while his family followed behind, herded along by the cajoling demons, towards the northern city gate, where they had waited ever since. More and more humans, neighbours, friends, co-workers, had entered the open plaza, pushed, pulled, sometimes dragged along by their terrifying jailers. Any time someone stepped out of line, a bone chilling screech could be heard, but thankfully, the monstrous dead hadn't started shooting them. Malek knew what panic could do to a mob like this and he was all too painfully aware that he was right in the middle of it.

He had seen things this night. Had seen grown men soil themselves as the skeletal remains of a man screamed at them with a voice that could surely split rocks.

Had seen bored little demons play ball with what he only hoped was actually a ball.

Had seen Jaffa, broken, bleeding, in some cases crying like children as they were walked away by even more of the ivory coloured terrors ironically armed with the warrior's own firestaffs.

And he wondered. He couldn't help it. While others had slaved away in the mines, on the fields, in the refineries and the ware houses, Malek had always worked with his mind. A mind that saw the signs, took notes and made calculations as the night neared its end.

The Jaffa had been beaten. The city had fallen, the invaders didn't even bother to extinguish the fires.

The Jaffa were being herded away like kettle, down into the tunnels, and some of their wraith like jailers were wearing the remains of Jaffa armour, none of which boded well for their future.

But the humans were not, and with them his children and his wife. So Malek prayed. To all the gods he could remember he prayed.

And then the demon came.

* * *

><p>I watched as the scared sheep retreated at my approach. It was near dawn. Time to wrap this up while I still had the majority of my

forces around. Skeletons didn't exactly like the light of the sun, their corrupted nature spurning it, but Imps and daylight simply didn't mix. If I didn't want a rather unseeming display of melting demons to undermine my authority, I would have to pull them back underground in a couple hours and have my other troops stand in the shade somewhere at least. For now, however, I commanded the ring of diggers and workers to contract around the humans. There were so many more of them then there were of my skeletons, the process by which those were created simply took to long, requiring starving under very specific circumstances.<p>

"Who speaks for you?" I thundered into the bunch of wretches. Only fearful eyes looked back at me in what was not an answer. I had the time for this, but I sure as hells didn't have the nerveâ€|. On my whim, five skeletons walked up to each side of me, staff weapons levelled at the crowd, which shrunk back in response. I could hear whispers and whimpers, crying and clamouring.

When they stopped, slightly behind me, their weapons snapped open and by the looks on the slaves' faces, they knew exactly what that meant. The crying intensified tenfold and the humans managed to compress their mass even further against the closed city gate. Truth be told, I was becoming increasingly fond of these things. Just readying them to shoot had left such an imprint on these peopleâ€| Actually ordering to open fire on the mass of bodies was probably a bad idea though. A frightened mob was good for business, but a panicked mob beyond control would stomp all over my troops and that was not what I needed right now.

"Who speaks for you?" I thundered again. Hopefully they weren't all sheep.

I swept my gaze over the teeming mass and noticed the one human that moved against the grain. Everyone wanted to get away, only one moved towards me. Hard to overlook, really. My mood rose.

And then, there he stood. Almost vomited out by the masses, the nearest kept alternating between frightened looks aimed at me, and what might very well be hopeful glimpses at their new envoy. Not much of an envoy, granted. Frail. Weak. Malnourished. Much better clothed than the rest of this lot thoughâ€|. Also had a female by the looks of the woman whose eyes were downright burying into his back now. And was that a babe she was clutching? Potential, potentialâ€|

"The Jaffa are beaten. This city, this land and all the riches of the earth around â€" are mine now." I gave pause here, just to see whether or not he would respond. When he tried to, I gave him a snarl and saw him shrink before me. Nice. The Jaffa had done some good conditioning it seemed. Not only were these people used to the whip, they expected it.

"I have made my use of the Jaffa..." And here I gestured around, indicating the undead. "I have a different use for your people." Well, some of them anyway. If this was all the measly resistance this world could offer, the contents of the armoury might very well suffice to conquer it and I wouldn't need to chuck them all into my magic prison cells. Otherwise, howeverâ€|.

* * *

><p>"I need craftsmen, mainly. You will organize them. You will tell me what your people can do, what they need in order to do it. When I need something from them, I will talk to you."<p>

Malek nodded, but the demon continued before he could contemplate making another attempt at speech. So far, the giant before him had kept his hands behind his back when he stood. Now he began to walk again and Malek could see his claws with increasing clarity as he approached. 'Gods protect me, he is coming towards me, his fear addled brain realisedâ€!' He wanted to run, he really did, but his legs refused. They had wavered the whole time. When he had tried to make his way here, when he had tried announcing his name, when the demon had growled at him. Wavered, yet for some reason, refused to buckle. And now, the traitorous things were rooting him to the spot entirely.

'It is okay', he told himself. 'You can't run anyway.' There was half the population of the city behind him. It had been hard enough to get here but he had no doubt in his heart, no matter how fast it was beating right now, that they wouldn't allow him back through.

His eyes rebelled against Malek as well. They remained rooted to the yellow demon's. When he finally stopped, so close that Malek could make out individual scales on his hide, the demon reached out for him, a wide grin revealing pointed teeth as long as fingers, and the human was sure, if his bowels had anything left to give, they would have done so â€" in this last moment before the torture began...

* * *

><p>The pain of the little human was almost palpable as I burned my mark into him. My thumbs pressed into his temples, I murmured the ancient spells that would bind him to me as my first, real minion on this world. Imps were useful, skeletons were fine, even better with these new weapons, really, but neither had the brains to swing a hammer for any other purpose than bashing someone's skull in, not to mention that a standing army of Imps required an upkeep of Mana that defied all reason.<p>

I had done this ritual so many times in the past that I could have recited the lines in my sleep, had so many bonds seen formed that by all rights it should be rather boring by now. But feeling the very essence of a creature twist and twitch in anguish as I chanted somehow never got old. His flesh, his skull, his very soul now bore my mark. Only mind shattering pain or crippling rage would be able to wash it away.

I let go of him and watched the little man crumble to the ground, then scramble onto his knees, putting his hands and forehead into the dust before me. A faint echo of his fear and pain was now barely noticeable at the edge of my awareness.

It was done.

He was mine!

"When the morning comes, my Imps will withdraw and the skeletons of your erstwhile slave drivers will retreat to the walls and fortifications. Any building that houses any of their weapons is taboo for you. Any weapon of theirs that is found in the city is to

be turned over to me. I will send some workers to collect whatever I need, then return at sunset to have some questions answered. I suggest you get this shit hole in order till then. Other than that, you and your people are free to do as you please."

One Skeleton, the one with the most armour remaining, walked over to the two of us.

"This one will accompany you." No more. No explanation. He could see it as a guard, if he liked, the true purpose of the construct would be to lend some weight to his authority. They were quite good at staring people down, even in daylight.

"Oh, and Malek?" He stopped rubbing the right side of his head, snapped back into prostrating position and almost bashed his skull in on the pavement.

"The next time we speak, you either look at me, or I will tear your eyes out, seeing how you obviously don't need them..."

His head whipped up immediately and I revelled at the torrent of emotion I could see in his eyes for another moment. Then I turned and left, the lone undead moving to position itself behind my new minion. On my way back to the nearest tunnel I contemplated this custom of theirs. Clearly he had been afraid that I would punish him if he did look at me, the lowering of one's gaze either a sign of respect or deference in his mind, but the clear opposite was my policy. Eyes were the windows to their souls after all. Anyone attuned to magic would surely agree. Which might have some weird implications for this place. It was high time I started the interrogations.

* * *

><p>Midday. Torture Chamber. Below Ileth

Unlike my Jaffa prisoners, who were either wasting away in the cells or digging through the rubble in Bahal, this one, I had been promised, was a little something else. And unlike the bulk of the Jaffa, who would work until they could work no more â€“ which wouldn't be all that long, since I wasn't feeding them â€“ and then go back to their cells to starve and let the prison work it's magic, this one I would probably keep in one form or another. I lifted the possession spell and exploded into being once more at the entrance of the only of my torture chambers that had seen use so far, and light use at that. There had been no need for it so far. Wasn't really my expertise either, although I had of course picked up a lot over the centuries.

As the slightly dazzled Imp sped away to resume his duties, I strolled through the regrettably very empty chamber, the only guest currently nailed to a wall, simply because I had yet to find the time and muse to actually build any torture devices. Part of the spell that created the room were the mechanic interfaces that marked the ground in regular intervals, places to slot torture racks, Catherine Wheels, Judas Chairs or really whatever into and allow the master of the chamber to run those devices on the Mana I supplied.

It was kind off uncomfortable really, how so much in my dungeon relied on me calling upon the workforce of others to achieve the greater things. At least the workshops came pre equipped with stone

anvils and forges and Trolls usually brought their own equipment with which to improve things.

I stopped at a closed valve which upon opening would unleash torrents of hell-fire on the belly of whatever was mounted on top at the time and recalled Brazen Bulls, heated metal spikes and boiling oil tubs.

"Good times, good times..." But this emptiness was just depressing.

I gave the metal frame that held my guest of honour a little jolt of magical lightning and watched her spasm for a few seconds. When she latched on to me with her hateful eyes and made ready to throw another round of obscenities at me, like she had done at every meeting we had had before, I waited for her to start " then simply gave her another jolt. I cleared my throat, made sure she could see me grin, then judged her ready for a little conversation.

"You were sayingâ€| Lady Arihes...?"

"Insolentâ€| My Lord will see you burn for thisâ€|..!"

"I remember you saying this before, yes. Until he does, however, you will remain my guest. Did you bite your tongue?"

Another jolt, lower power this time. Humans didn't react all that well to electricity.

"It has been a few days since last we spoke and I have to say, I am still not any closer to the mystery you represent, Mylady."

Several mysteries, actually. For one, someone who had been prodded, poked, burned and electrocuted on an almost daily basis for over a week now should really not have that much spunk left in her. The hatred I saw in her eyes defied all the experience I had with humans so far. Then againâ€|.

"You are not Jaffa." That would have at least explained her healing abilities. I had had a few hours of fun testing the limits of thoseâ€|

"You are not human either." Though her Aura looked deceptively like theirs, I had to say.

"And you are most certainly not a god..." That got a rise out of her again. She collected what little spittle and blood filled her mouth and sent it all my way. I really had no idea why humans found that insulting. I got sprayed with more and nastier fluids in every second battleâ€|.

"So.", I turned back to a table made of a large treetrunk I had ordered my imps to hack on the surface. The improvised furniture was still oozing treetap and the rough metal tools lying on it were slightly sticky. Didn't matter. The chamber was currently set to default, which meant that nothing could die in here. Any infections or parasites the various knives, pliers and pincers might inflict upon the fallen god would not be allowed to do much more than weaken her before the integrated healing spell would activate and remove them. Picking a long knife, then pinching the tip of the blade

between two fingers, I turned around again, grinning both for the effect I knew a nice set of teeth had on most creatures and because of the signs of distress that began to show on her face as the blade started to glow.

"Let's talk a bit about why exactly you were in that workshop in the middle of the night..."

* * *

><p>Late afternoon, ruins of Bahal

Malek had his own office now, although calling the tent that was maybe a bit of an overstatement. As the demonâ€|. _the Keeper_, a voice whispered in his thoughts, had promised, the little demonsâ€| _Impsâ€|. Had withdrawn before first daylight and the only one of the dead Jaffa remaining was the one stalking him. Were they really dead? They had to, hadn't they? True, usually the dead didn't get up and shoot the living. Then again, this armour reminded him of something, someone. And every time he turned around to look the thingâ€|. _Constructâ€|. The whisper againâ€| it turned it's head, then tilted it in this weird fluid motion that he couldn't shake he had seen before.

Malek shivered and returned to work. He had spent most of the early morning walking from one gate to the next and talking to the people that had been gathered at each one. Once he had explained the situation, the Skeletons at that particular gate had retreated, leaving the former slaves to their own devices, and most had promptly dispersed, returned to their own houses or wherever. Most of them had either seen him before or knew him personally, although he wasn't liked all that much, being a scribe to the enemy would do that to your reputation. But his ivory chaperone had given his words an amount of authority he never would have expected. And so all had given him much more attention than they otherwise would have.

Then came the routine part. Gather all the other scribes, see them set up somewhere, and begin to take inventory. The warehouses were still intact, that was good, so they had enough parchment and ink at least. And thus had ended the routine partâ€|

He had sent some of the men around town to gather everyone in one place again, so he could properly list all the survivors, their names and jobs. But hardly anyone had turned up. A bit later the shouting and the smoke had started again and he had run faster than his guardian could keep up, back to the warehouses. One of them was on fire, with a few men trying to extinguish the flames, another was suddenly empty. Dead, wounded and fighting men he found in front of both and another group was trying to break open the third under the cover of their club armed companions.

Malek had almost despaired at that point. Almost. Then he had strode into the unholy mess, raised his voice, and when that didn't help, raised it louder, and when that still didn't work, had covered in sudden fear as his guardian had raised his own instead, the eerie outcry bringing the riot to a stop almost instantly. He had then spent an hour convincing the robbers that if this continued, none of them would likely see the light of the morrow, no matter how much food was stolen from the warehouses. He knew somewhere deep in his guts, that trying to persuade them to give back what they had stolen

was probably pointless, but at least he managed to get the fires under control and a guard detail set up. All in all, it had been a lot more stressful than he had expected.

Now, as the deadline, very appropriate term, he thought, approached, he was finally compiling the list from the several others the scribes had managed to make. They had had to go from house to house in the end.

Well, at least cleanup had gone easier than expected. For some reason they had found not a single corpse in all the city, meaning the demon had probably taken the dead and Malek really didn't want to know why or what for. The buildings themselves were mostly made from clay, so while fire was a problem it at least didn't threaten all of town with flaming death. Water was still plentiful, he had the hunch that no one would need food for the next day or so, the gates were still blocked, so they couldn't go work in the fields or try and run away and overall, everyone was still so damned scared that the rest of the day promised to be rather quiet. Good. Malek's mind needed some quiet before he could face that horror again.

* * *

><p>Midnight. Workshop under Bahal

The sound of fired forges, the scent of molten metal and the occasional scream when someone put his hands somewhere unhealthy reverberated through the room and filled my dark heart with a joy I hadn't expected. Finally I could really begin. It would take some time for the appropriated blacksmiths and carpenters to get the workshop up to speed, and then of course I would have to see how skilled they actually were in providing the things I needed, but for some part at least the magic of the workshop would make up for any gross incompetencies.

I had demanded that every craftsmen take at least three apprentices down here with them. I couldn't call on the endless Troll-reserves of the underworld after all, so I needed to expand my workforce in a more untraditional way. They would learn soon enough and take their own apprentices.

After digging out a few additional rooms nearby for lairs and another for a mess hall and a kitchen I turned to my own devices, the buzzing of three dozen additional minions a pleasing background noise in my mind. They could build the chairs and tables themselves, surely, enough wood had been brought down, and the cook was already hard at work providing a midnight snack. I had been tempted to throw one of the mongrels into the next blast furnace when I caught him sound asleep in a corner of the room earlier, but had decided to rip his heart out instead in front of everyone and then heal him of course, before he could succumb to his wounds. I didn't have enough workers as it was. Now, I had a feeling, they wouldn't stop working until sunrise, at which point they would be free to collapse, that was what the lairs were for after all. I would have Malek draft a schedule for shift work next week or so, for now, with these numbers, I would have to be satisfied with following the rhythm of the sun.

All the while, in my private little workshop, there lay several staff weapons in various states of disassembly. None among the ex-slaves

had known, surprisingly, how to build or even service them, and after some prodding I had found out that neither had the Jaffa. The most one of them, their leader, who was awaiting a more thorough chat with me in his single cell, had known was how to reload the damn things, although the amount of shots they allegedly held had boggled my mind. Getting to that little green glowing bottle had been hard enough, I lacked all the necessary tools to take these apart and had broken a number of knives already trying to brute force it. It reminded me very much of the first time I had ever seen a metal screw, which had struck me as ingenious at the time. Not that I used all that many of those in any of my designs. They were far too troublesome to make in any meaningful quantities.

Well, not that I cared. The bulk of my enemies in the area was broken, the number of my minions was increasing, all was finally right with the world again. I had the time to fumble around a little with crude mechanics. Maybe take some of that glowing liquid to the alchemy lab and play around a little. After, I remembered, the bumbling wretches had made some pitchers and flasks for me. My brows furrowed. Another day then.

* * *

><p>Late Morning. At the Stargate

I looked up at the slender metal ring, now upright again and secured against tipping over with a new, masonry pedestal. After having a little chat with the old Jaffa last night, I had woken half the city and ordered it done. At the moment it was still mostly secured by a dozen strong ropes, the mortar hadn't had the time to dry yetâ€|. .

"So this is a portal of some kind?"

The old man snickered. He was kneeling a few feet away, ironically guarded by two of the slaves he had lorded it over just a week ago. I had little doubts he could kill the two idiots if he really tried, even with the metal bar I had bent around his wrists to secure them behind his back in absence of shackles. They were there more to remind him of the turnaround than keep me safe.

"This, demon, is the 'Ring of the gods', the Chappa'ai. It is by my god's might that I and my warriors came here, and by his might more warriors will come through it and avenge us. The will of the sun cannot be denied."

Meaning I should really bury the thing. Then again, it was probably a faster way to find the remaining cities on this mud ball. I could easily fortify this.

"Where does it lead?"

The old man grinned. "To a thousand places, all ruled by the mighty Ra. All defended by forces a thousand times as strong as mine. This is just a measly mining world. The smallest of my Lord's possessions."

"Promising! How do I get there? How does it work?"

When the Jaffa didn't answer immediately, I turned around. His face

was not the mask of defiance I had expected however. Instead he looked rather stupefied.

"Youâ€|. You wantâ€|.??" his eyes darted in between the ring and me. Then a chuckle broke the surface of his wrinkled face. "You truly want to make war on the gods?" The chuckle grew into laughter and his two guards became uneasy, which in turn amused me greatly. They clearly thought they should do something about this, but even it was even more obvious they were still afraid of the Jaffa, kneeling and bound as he was. I chose one of them at random and send a fireball at him that send him flying for a few meters, where he hit the ground, already dead. Both his companion and the Jaffa stopped fidgeting and watched as the green flames danced upon the corpse and fizzled out a few seconds later. A new and stronger spell, accounting for the rather tough armour the Jaffa wore, and the slave hadn't worn any, hence the crater in his chest was rather large.

When the two turned around, I addressed the remaining guard, right hand still surrounded by green ambers.

"Next time, don't hesitate!" He grabbed his staff harder and nodded fiercely.

"Well", the Jaffa remarked, humour gone from his voice, "You certainly have their attitudeâ€|."

I shrugged. I hadn't thought about it that much.

"But you cannot hope to defeat the gods. I don't know how we awoke you, what stone you crawled from under. But if I could hold against you, with what little I had, what chance do you have against the mull might of the Supreme System Lord himself? He wouldn't be bothered by what you did to that man. He would suffer your fire like I would a summer breeze, and blow away your little demons with the power of a winter storm."

"So, your kind has magic after all. I was beginning to wonder."

"What are you talking about, demon? Look behind you! Is the ring not prof enough? The gods are invincible!"

I looked at the ring, more because of the surprise than because of anything else. Then I kneeled before him to better see his face.

"The ring is magic?"

His angry look broke like a wave on a rock. His clenched jaw gaped open for a moment as he looked at me, obviously taken aback by my words, just like I was by his.

"Are the staffs magic too?"

I had found no evidence of either. Not that I had managed to take a staff apart yet, but so far I had found not a shred of magic, no runes of any significance or power, and the glowing liquid that supposedly powered them was so utterly mundane, so devoid of Manaâ€| I had thought it a battery of sorts at first, as if some clever sorcerer had managed to somehow contain a couple fireballs inside it

and build the staff as a means to unleash it, but had then concluded in the absence of Mana that it was most likely just a device instead, like a crossbow, just a lot more powerful.

There were a lot of crystals embedded in this great ring, so maybe I needed to take a closer look, but even an inactive portal should emanate something, shouldn't it? I couldn't have overlooked this, surely.

Do'Urden, wasn't that his name, was still flabbergasted when I turned to face him again. Well, skip that for the momentâ€|

"And you can really sent people through this?"

"The gods move amongst the stars at will!" He seemed to be on auto pilot now, taking refuge in his Lord's propaganda. Their mighty armies are without end! Their chariots blot out the sun! You are a fool to stand against them! They will come for you. And they will strike down all who follow you."

Probably a quip to the sorry excuse of a guard standing next to him. Truth be told, I was getting rather bored of this god talk, however peculiar it was. I had dealt with both gods and pretenders in the past. Had assaulted their followers, burned their churches, desecrated their holy places. Usually, parading a true believer around in chains in front of an object of worship such as this didn't get you mere insults from said believer. It got you hit with lightning. I had somewhat expected that outcome, truth be told, and an Imp was standing on a deadman switch connected to several tons of gunpowder, three meters below us, just in case this sun god turned out to be the real deal. I couldn't just let these two run back to the city and undermine my authority while my dungeon shut down waiting for me to reincarnate. Digging the Stargate out of another hole was infinitely preferable to quenching a rebellion, I had just brought these peasants to heel after all.

This was weird though. If this "Ra" was just a pretender, he had to be a very impressive one, for him to invent the staffs, the cannons, and the ring and pass it all off as magic, for this guy to be this fiercely loyal to him. And if he wasn't, well, that begged the question: Why was I not black and crispy yet? Where was he? Busy?

Hm. One more idea.

"How does your god even know I'm here? I scrapped the portal, didn't I? You told me it doesn't work lying down."

"I told them, fool! When my Jaffa came to warn me of your attack on Ileth, when your little monsters came to take us and failed, I told the gods of you. They know everything now!"

"You mean when they ran away from me, tails in between their legs. Told them? How? Oh, don't tell me. You prayed to themâ€|.." I made it sound as derogatory as I possibly could.

"The all seeing Eye of Ra is mine, demon! Gifted to me by Lord Aker himself, so I could contact him directly in times of need!"

Now that sounded very much like a crystal ball. I would probably have

to take a personal look through the barracks. Who knew what other knick knacks could be found thereâ€|.

My thoughts must have shown on my face, for Do'Urden's distorted in a smile.

"Don't bother, demon. The eye won't speak to you! Only in my presence the gods listen to a plea brought before it!" Now it was my turn to laugh. And I did. I threw my head back and roared at the heavens, at the sky, at the sun this fool confused with his god. And this man called me a fool...

"You still don't get it, little man!" I raised my hands to the sky, still grinning like a madman, still a chuckle rocking my belly.

"You are beaten! Your men, what is left of them, serve me now! Your weapons have failed! Your city has fallen! Your gods have abandoned you!"

"My gods are invincigaghâ€|...!" Very good timing for that smack over the head! That guard was learningâ€|.

"No one is coming for you, little man! I will take your staffs apart, piece by piece, until I can build my own! I will take your men, and your Lady Arihes apart until I am bored and feed whatever remains to the wolves!

And everything you say! Every little detail, every new surprise you bring me, every remark you make just makes me want to take you apart as well!"

I strode towards him, picked him up and pulled him up so I could look him in the eye, pre-empting another attempt to spit at me by head butting him in the face.

"Lie to yourself, if you must, old man! There is no one coming!"

End of Chapter

* * *

><p>It has to be saidâ€|. _

_**Rooms**__ â€" In the games, when you designated a room as a rookery, temple, training room, whatever, they came fully equipped. In this case, not so much. I want to keep the magical generation of stuff out of nothing to an absolute minimum, so every piece of equipment has to be built by someone, hence the Keeper missing the Trolls so much... Imps like to chisel stuff in their free time, but are useless at most everything else._

Rooms also had certain magical elements attributed to them. Libraries allowed warlocks to learn stuff at an amazing rate, Workshops enabled even the meekest lvl 1 Troll to craft whatever the Keeper wanted. I will try to bring over as much of the mechanics as I can fit into this story.

* * *

><p>Afterword_

_I always feel very annoyed when by clicking the "next-chapter-button" I find myself immersed knee deep in answers the author of that particular story wants to deliver to his reviewers. I want to read the flippin story, not scroll through half a page of stuff, get out of my face, damnitâ€|. _

Now, however, that I find myself in the position of those authors I suddenly have mixed feelings about the whole thing.

_I am deeply grateful for any and all feedback you fine people can give me, I really am. If you enjoyed the story, feel free to drop me a few lines, If you hated it and can keep your anger civil, feel free to do the same. _

I don't want to make you feel like you are throwing words at a wall. But the emphasis should still lie with the story itself, I feel, so I will address any reviews, any suggestions, any questions down here at the bottom of the page in the future, so anyone who has reached this part of the page, if you are only interested in the story:

Push teh Buton now!

Lastly, truth be told, if you DO ask questions, you have to be aware that I might stonewall you when you ask anything plot related. The answer will most likely come sooner or later in the story itself.

Also, this section will likely change if and when more reviews trickle in. I might take a look and update it every time I post a new chapter.

**So, onwards. **

I am not quite sure how to integrate the hole torture thing into the story. The Keeper is most certainly a sadistic bloke, so he might do some for fun every now and again, but at this point, he hasn't had either the time or the need for it. So no, no one has been turned.

_Warlocks and Rogues from DKII certainly look human enough and they can enter into a contract freely, so torture is not an absolute requirement. Also torturing a human usually results in them not liking you very much, plus various nasty mental disorders. Then again, who knows. The Keeper is neither human himself nor has he extended contact to our species. He simply might not understand how fragile our little minds really are....

The story will contain elements and mechanics out of DKI, DKII and maybe WftO, the so called "spiritual successor" of the series. I will change some, add some, subtract some and extrapolate some, seeing how there was no Stargate in the games.

Oh, and in case the chapter end didn't jinx it enough:

_Tempting the Goa'uld. What could possibly go wrong....

Chapter 4 " Invasion

Okay, so maybe, just maybe, "There is no one coming", had been a miscalculation on my part. But seriously, how could I have known this? They always exaggerated. Always painted their gods in grander colours than were actually due, more often than not they outright lied. How could I have known this frequent talk of 'other worlds', of 'moving between the stars' of giant flipping chariots " was actually true!

How could I have predicted something like this?

And as I watched, the Preon-Class Ha'tak, with the giant Eye of Ra emblazoned on it's flanks descended upon the planet, clouds of Death Gliders flying in support, weapon domes circling, searching for a targetâ€|.

* * *

><p>X-3 days " Dungeon under Bahal " Library

I enjoyed every stay in a library, even more so when I had some free time on my hand. The spellwork in this room was so precise, so beautifully done, soâ€| pristine. Unlike most of my other rooms, this one " and the "Create Imp" spell " was almost a work of art. It sometimes made me wonderâ€|

The magic didn't work for me of course. Libraries were conduits to a Keeper's mind, able to exchange information with it in both directions. I felt at ease here, in some weird way, but expecting more would be like hooking up a blood transfusion from my right arm to my left and expecting that to do something. Well, if I actually had any blood...

And at the moment I didn't have any free time either. I was overseeing one of Malek's scribes as he wrote down rune after rune on the parchment. This was an experiment of sorts, and one that had me on edge by now. He had lost most of his vitality in the last week, as the quill in his hand drew upon his life blood and indeed his very life while he jotted down arcane runes, copying them from the recently finished book. They still couldn't work any magic, not enough to light a candle, and I was beginning to think something was fundamentally wrong with the humans on this world, but for the purpose I had in mind, this way was not only sufficient, it was in some ways even preferable. That was, if the sod didn't go ahead and die on me before he was finished. In which case I had wasted a week of my time. Seeing him deteriorate in the last days, I had assured him that his family would follow him shortly if he did and would have some fun stories to tell him. A little something to give him the will to carry on, or so I hoped.

When he reached out with trembling hand to turn the page on the bound volume his colleagues had provided him, I did it for him instead, both impatient and eager to carry on. Come on! Just 10 more runes, damn you!

But an hour later I rejoiced. All sheets were done, the blood on the last one was drying and awaited my double checking of his work and the others were propped up and ready to be carried off. Handling

these was a bitch in the best of cases, but blood, even infused blood, didn't stick very well to parchment, and I found my ire surging, not for the first time. Being cut off from the underworld was growing more and more infuriating with every gods damned little problem. It had been all so easy. In the old days Warlocks didn't run out of paper! They always brought their own stacks and usually a trunk full of books with them, which would then be added to the library of course, giving me something to assimilate. I had never given a second thought to what they did when they ran low on paper or ink, hadn't bothered to think about paper at all. It was the flawed method of mortals for storing and passing on knowledge. Every Warlock had his own special ink mixture, some really quite intriguing, but now that my only option was to have my scribes write on treated animal hides, which were a nightmare to prepare and keep stocked in meaningful quantities, not to mention bind to books, I had found myself pondering the question. It had probably been one of the things they spend their wages on, when they went back to the underworld on their free time. Goblins had usually returned drunk, Orcs with a new tattoo and some raunchy jokes, Mistresses with a smile and even more gold, and Warlocks with a new spell or book or staff or robe.

I knew, in theory, how paper was made. Chop down flax, do something with the plant to get fibres, add water and sieves, and voilÃ , paper. Only that it wasn't so easy, apparently. For the last two weeks some of my workers had been busy trying to figure out what I even wanted from them. They had never seen paper, had problems envisioning the concept â€" or the machines I wanted them to build and had myself no idea what they were, really, and were thus treading on new â€" and rather treacherous â€" ground. Me smashing one of their number's head in in frustration had not helped the matter.

"Good! Everything seems to be in order. MALEK!" my standard shout the last few days. As usual, my head scribe appeared, as if by magic, the look on his face, as usual, somewhere in between dutiful servitude and abject fear. I needed the little guy, so I worked to keep my temper in check around him, but if not knowing that kept him on edge, why tell him?

"Get the last sheet mounted and call someone to carry them. I am putting this to the test."

That was something new as well. Not all who worked for me were actually bound to me. Over the four weeks since the victory over the Jaffa I had taken more and more of the human population of Bahal in my service, which had created numerous problems, I remembered with a frown. The first of which had been them weirding me out with their reluctance to take gold coins as paymentâ€!

Most Jaffa were dead by now, flesh stripped from their bones which now served without rest or hesitation, and which I had found were better at handling staffs than any skeletons I had created from the former slaves. They were taller and their bones were thicker as a rule as well, so I had not bothered to turn many baseline humans aside from a few for various experiments. Even after the siege had ended, I had been left with way over 2 thousand prisoners, of which only a few remained alive as workers on the surface to this day, sifting through the ruins. It yielded some salvage, to be sure, but mostly served as a means to acquaint my new human warriors watching over them with the attitude they needed. Training rooms were doing

good work, as always, a new version I had dubbed the "firing range" had done a lot to increase their accuracy, but the human element should never be underestimated. If they cut their teeth on malnourished, grumpy Jaffa, I had at least some hope they wouldn't break immediately when they had to go and kill the real thing, which by now I was awaiting with baited breath. Four weeks since Bahal had last made contact with it's overlords, the response army surely had to be on it's way by now.

Pretty early on I had been rather shocked to suddenly feel intruders entering my dungeon, only to find out it had been a working detail, consisting at least in part of humans I had not taken into my service officially. By now there were always a few of them, coming and going, bringing in raw materials from the surface, selling or buying food, carrying out one errand or another. Basically they were Bahal's Imps, I thought with amusement. Took some getting used to, to not jump constantly at that feeling. I should probably claim the rest of them before that became a bad habit.

"My Lord, we are ready. We await your command."

I nodded, then, following a sudden inspiration: "And the title is 'Keeper', Malek. Try to remember that..." predictably, that made him flinch and I graced him with another full toothed grin, as he struggled to correct himself, putting him off balance further.

The title was, truly, not that important. I preferred it, matter of fact, the insinuation there that I was more than their Lord, more than the one that merely commanded them. That I well and truly owned them and every time the word was spoken, there was the subconscious reminder of it. But I really didn't care all that much.

I scratched my chin and looked him up and down. "I could of course give you a little help. Edge it into you somewhere..."

Again he bowed, again he stumbled through the words. Honestly, I just liked to see him jumpâ€|.

"Well, another day perhaps." I then turned to the 13 assembled humans, each holding one wooden T-shaped rod, with the inscribed sheet of parchment secured to the horizontal bit.

"Follow me, all of you. Damage the script in any way and I will feed you your offspring's hearts. Come, Malek. To the graveyard."

Like a religious procession we entered the tunnels, a few Imps joining us after a minute, following behind as well as making sure the way ahead was clear, shooing away any who went about their business and generally making a mess of things. I had invested too much time and nerves in this to see it fail now.

* * *

><p>The graveyard had been one of the earliest rooms to be build soon as the siege of Bahal had begun. The dead from the fighting had gone here, and a few more I had had killed and buried every week, just to speed the process along. By now, the place was saturated. Ready. We entered the place, a large underground plain, devoid of the life that usually began to grow in places like this, where mother earth was exposed to the air. No, despite the residual dampness that always

permeated the place, no mould, no fungus. The only life that was present here was that which walked through the doors " and the one naked Jaffa of course, whose feet were chained to the open monolithic coffin in the centre.<p>

"A good day to you, Master Do'Urden. Be assured, it is actually day. Sunny, even."

"Sokar take you, demon!"

"Hm. Believe it or not, I actually know what that means by now. Shouldn't it be: 'Sokar take me back', though?" The old Jaffa only snarled at me. He had sat on the edge of the coffin when we entered, when the humans, who had to look like weird banner men, were arrayed by Malek along the wall. Now he stood again, shrugging off the weight of years as easily as he did that of the last month. There was a reason I had chosen him for this and I smiled.

"Now, I am afraid, your use to me has come to an end. What you see here", I gestured, "Well, I guess you could take the parchment as your burial shroud."

He spat at the ground between my feet, then straightened. "Do as you will. Whoever talks to you in my stead, my conscience is clean. I don't know what this is supposed to be, but you will not see me beg! I will go to the gods with my head held high."

"Hm. We will see about that!" I turned back to look at the thirteen standard bearers, then pointed at the one I needed first. "You. Come here." Before he reached the two of us, I bade him to stop.

"Now, Master Jaffa, there is but one thing! You see, it is a rather expensive burial shroud. It took quite a while to prepare this for you and I would rather not see it damaged or torn to shreds in a last act of defiance." A fire lit in Do'Urden's eyes. It was one of the reasons why his place was better reserved for a willing man. You could hardly haggle with someone who was about to die! Usually, that was.

"And what would you have me do, then? Come here, little human! Let me take a look at that rag, let me take a closer look. If this is going to carry me to the afterlife, I think I should be allowed to see whether I even like it."

I held up a hand, just in case. Do'Urden snarled at the man.

"A few of your brothers are still alive, Jaffa. If you do me this one service, I might be tempted to leave it that way."

"Feed your lies to whatever turncoat you have found amongst my men, Demon! If I have learned anything these last four days in this place, it is that Jaffa lives mean nothing to you. Your promises are not worth the foul air that carries them! You will spare none of us!"

Well, he had me there. Jaffa were literally worth more dead to me than alive. Especially this one.

"How about this promise then. I'll chain you up in the torture chamber instead, as a spectator, mind you. You can be the last Jaffa

to die instead. Admittedly that will take awhile, but my interrogators have to learn their handiwork eventually. They won't lack for enthusiasm, I don't think. Not against your kindâ€|"

Do'Urden strained against his chains. He didn't try and reach for me, at least, that would have looked plain ridiculous, but he tried shuffling his feet forward more than could be healthy for his ankles.

"Did I mention how many children are still alive?" Well, none, but he didn't need to know thatâ€|

And it apparently did the trick. His feet stopped the senseless act of defiance, then moved back into a more comfortable position. The chain no longer taut, his eyes were still shooting arrows at me, yet his shoulders slumped somewhat.

"Go on, thenâ€| Do your worst..."

"That's much better. Hold your arms out, to the sides. Yes, like that. Feet further apartâ€|. Good. Now hold."

I gestured to one more of the men to approach, then took the first parchment from the contraption holding it and hanged it over his left arm. The next went over the right.

"Okay, now you, then you, then you, you, youâ€|..." Malek took note of course and one by one the men approached. One by one Do'Urden was draped in the 13 Parchments of various sizes, which stuck to his bare skin as if glued to it. Very good. Finally, the last went around his neck, then criss cross over his chest. By now his arms were straining. Another disadvantage of parchment, I thought. The stuff was rather heavyâ€| Well, only one more thing to do.

I pulled a dagger, the finest piece the blacksmiths had managed to make in four weeks of trying and the only one that had passed muster. I was really missing my Trolls. The runework on the blade I had done myself, the etching that followed at least had been competently done. I looked Do'Urden into the eyes one last time. "Remember. 53 Jaffa. Their deaths will be on me, eventually, but how they die is entirely up to youâ€| Now hold. Don't! Move!"

I began to chant. Every now and again, I cut him. Light, deeper, light again. When I was finished at last, I could see the red haze forming among the unmarked grave. Could feel the Batteries emptying. The drain was increasing quickly. One last cut, catch a single drop of blood. Paint the last rune on his forehead. Then step back.

Malek's men were becoming increasingly uneasy. Red mists swirled along their feet, pulled at their legs. By now they would hear the whispers, I knew. It was done, the creature was summoned. Now it was circling, like a shadow to a flame, drawn like a moth to the fire to Do'Urden, as he was the only means of relieve. Then, a scream from the other side of the veil. Malek's eyes were about as fixed to the Jaffa as were my own, I barely noticed one of the men collapsing as the shadow finally appeared behind the Jaffa Master, janked his head to the side, then took a deep bite into his throat, before both disappeared in darkness as all torches went out in unison.

When they flickered on again, both were gone, shadow and Jaffa, the shackles empty. In their stead, stood a pale man, bareheaded, naked, a body that would have made a statue blush. His face resembled Do'Urden, to be sure, but also every one of the dozens of Jaffa who shared this place with him. The very first Vampire I had summoned myself in over a millenium. And it had all gone off without a hitch. I walked up to the new spawn, who looked about the place with curiosity.

"Hear me!" It's white eyes focussed on me. "Who am I?"

"_Masterâ€|. Keeperâ€|.." _the voice both an echo and a silent scream.

"And who are you?" This seemed to trouble him some more. He tilted his head. Looked around. Looked at me again. Straightened out.

"_Urden..." -

I smiled. His gods would not have him after all.

* * *

><p>X-2 days â€" Dungeon under Bahal â€" Servant quarters

Teela honestly couldn't remember a time in her life when she had been more content with â€" well, everything. Her children were well fed, healthy and happy. She wasn't wearing rags any more but linen that had been woven specifically for her. The sheer luxury! And this 'lair'! At the start they had lived together with a dozen others, huddled together like sheep in winter. Malek had somehow changed that. Argued with the Keeper that he would benefit from larger living quarters for himself and his family. That humans didn't really thrive on being penned like beasts. It was the one thing, Malek had said one evening, you could rely on for him to not kill you for. For some reason, the "Yellow Demon" really liked to digâ€|.

And now they had this. A large room, big enough for a king! The children could run and play in here, the walls were long enough to hold Malek's desk, his books, scrolls, tools on one side, a place to cook on another, and still have enough room in the middle for the large table that could fit the whole family and some guests! They had two additional rooms, which had seemed to Teela like one more than anyone could possibly need. By now, however, she was thankful for the privacy. The thick stone walls made it absolutely impossible to hear what anyone was doing in even an adjacent room, which she definitely appreciated, and so the children now had their own bedroom.

Oh, sure, there still were downsides. She didn't have to carry in firewood, the flames somehow fed themselves, but theâ€| thingâ€| above the stove that inhaled the smoke from the fire seemed to breathe even when she wasn't cooking, was shaped like some kind of animal and sometimes Teela wasn't quite so sure it wasn't following her around the room with those red painted eyes. Living underground had taken some gotten used to even if she didn't have to stay down here all the time. And then of course there was Malek still working for someone who was likely to kill him on a whim or a bad day. She

doubted it would happen though. Unlike the Jaffa, to whom he had been just another scribe running the city for them, the Keeper needed Malek. He, her husband, she thought not without pride, was basically the glue that held this whole thing together. When he went out in the morning, he went topside, to talk to hunters, lumberjacks, farmers and whoever else remained on the surface. He talked to the craftsmen when the Keeper wanted something done, which was all the time, apparently, he saw to it that the kitchens had the food they needed, that the resources from up top were delivered, that everyone knew where he had to go and to be. That ghastly skeleton that had followed him around everywhere for the first week was gone by now, thank the godsâ€¦ Teela stopped in her thoughts.

Should she really be thanking those pricks? Sure the Keeper's moniker was justified, the children sometimes still had nightmares about those first nights. But the minions of Ra had never done anything like this for them â€“ and plenty to them. In the service of the Jaffa, they would have likely died sooner rather than later and the girls would have had a future as scullery maids or gods forbid prostitutes to look forward to. There she went again. Teela smiled. Time to stop brooding.

She took the remaining silver and copper pieces from the top shelf, and after some quick math, took another gold piece. She would go to the money lender on her way to the market. That had taken some getting used to, she thought as she went to wake the girls. Halima drooled on her while she struggled to get her into clothes so new she had hardly had any chance yet to rip them and Sekani, having always taken such things as a challenge, was jumping up and down. They would spent the day at a friend's, up on the surface.

When Teela returned from up top, she was all out of copper. She stepped out of the crowded elevator, arm full of vegetables, ignored the skeletons standing guard and went on to find Pesh, the moneylender, who strangely enough wasn't in direct employ of the Keeper. He just set up shop down here every day, took in gold, handed out silver and copper, Teela had no idea where he got those from.

Strange how fast you got used to the weirdest of things. Four weeks ago she had counted the days by her work. On firstnight, she could steal some food in the kitchen of the garrison. Second, there had been that tavern, the "Golden Sun", that always needed some help that evening. Then third, fourth, fifth, and so on. They had been living from the hand to the mouth really, sometimes trading for things you could store and trade away again later. Today? Twenty copper for a silver, twenty silver for a gold. A micro piglet cost ten silver, a chicken five, vegetables you could get ranging from a single copper to several, generally speaking cooking yourself was cheaper than eating out, but that was nothing new. Clothes were more expensive of course and you could only get them on the surface, furniture cost even more, mostly because the orders of the Keeper were more important and the time of the workers limited. A pleasant kind of madness.

She had gone from her old lifestyle to this counting of metal bits against her husbands weekly "income" in a surprising short space of time, Teela thought. Already she was looking forward to maybe using their excess coin for something nice once the workshops weren't so fully booked any more. Another metal pan, maybe. They would be able

to afford it in a few weeks. Life was strange, wasn't it? Oh! She needed to pick up the chicken!

Malek returned late, as usual, and goâ€œ! hrm. Man, did he look tired. She saw him close the door absent mindedly then shamble to their room and collapse onto their large bed. Teela had been fixing Sekani's robe, the girl had managed to rip it somewhere. Now she put aside her sewing kit to attend to her husband, who seemed to be in dire need of some patching too.

She sat down next to him and just stroked his hair for a while. It had been like this for the last few days. Sleep hardly seemed to relax him anymore and he came home looking like death.

"You look like something a dog wouldn't lift his leg at, husband..."

"Oh, Teela, you have no idea..." He laid his head in her lap, took her hand like a drowning man grasping for a branch.

"I have never done so much in a single day. Never written so much â€“ and yet so beautiful. My symbols get better every day. Clearer. My hand gets faster and more sure of themselves the more I write in that gods awful place."

"But that's good, isn't it?" he looked up at her as if she had just proclaimed the sky to be green.

"Teela, you don't know what it's like. To hear the whispers every day. To have your thoughts filled with things and pictures and words that are not your own. My hands are faster now and more precise, but as long as I work in the library â€“ they are hardly my hands. Sometimes I think I could close my eyes, go to sleep and they would continue without me." he sighed. "Dorn didn't come to work today..."

Okay, that was bad. Teela knew enough about the Keeper that stuff like this probably meant Dorn wouldn't be coming back. "What happened to him?"

"We don't know. He didn't feel good the day before yesterday and by the time we broke for the night the next, he was talking to himself. Or maybe he wasn't. Maybe we just couldn't hear whatever it was he was talking to."

Teela decided it was time to change the subject. "The girls think about you a lot, Malek." it seemed to work. Malek relaxed slightly, his eyes regained some colour.

"The girls! How are they?"

"Like squirrels in spring. Sekani is getting more boyish then I would like, but Halima is as cute as a button still. Do you remember, three weeks ago, when she tasted chicken for the first time? She asks me every day if she can have some. That is your doing, husband. For your family. Once every week we can have meat now. Real meat, not those awful leftover sausages." He seemed to relax under her words now.

"When I went to get them, she wanted to visit you at work.."

Oopsâ€œ!

"NO!" Aaand there he went. Nice Work Teela. In a second Malek sat next to her, grasping her hand almost painfully now. "Never do that! Teela, you hear me, never! Keep the kids away from the library! Away fromâ€œ!" From him. Yeah, that went without saying. There was a good chance these days, if you went to find Malek, the Keeper wasn't far away and no matter how good everyone had it, the rumours about what he used those teeth for persisted. Still. This husband of her's needed a wakeup call.

"Malek...", she pried his hand free from his grasp and took his head in both hands, gave him a kiss on the forehead.

"You are doing good, husband. The family is save, thanks to youâ€œ! The kids are happy, they have friends they can play with, they haven't gone to bed hungry for weeks. For weeks! They have clothes, they are warm in the night, we don't have to send them to work. Don't you know how lucky we are?" He slumped again at her soothing words. "You are right. You are right, of course, Teela..." Malek lay down on the bed and pulled her down next to him. "Maybe this really is better. Although I doubt he would have qualms about setting kids to work. They just creep him out, I think."

Teela was speechless for a second, then chuckled. No way that was true...

* * *

><p>X-1 day â€œ Dungeon under Bahal â€œ Private Workshop

"So it's actually heated air? You can hit someone with air as if it was a burning club?" Pictures entered my mind. Air was inhaled into the backside of the oval structure, then an orange flash at the front and the small projectile hurtled away, slower than it would have in reality. The Staff weapon fell apart before my eyes and I watched intently as the pieces arrayed themselves around the staff that still represented the middle of it all.

"Yes, yes, I've seen this beforeâ€œ!. There. What are those? Those ripped metal cylinders? Coils? What use is a coil that tightly woundâ€œ!?"

More pictures. More thoughts. Little actual explanations. Ghosts were like that. Unfocused, or maybe just illiterate. I pondered for a while the memories that were now my own, then picked up the crystal pyramid resting on the fine wooden table before me. I appreciated a good piece of craftsmanship and for a rushed job, this was really nice. Unusual design, what with the three legs. Then again, I had been equally surprised to find the crystal I was now holding to form into the shape of a pyramid. I focused my attention on it and the purple haze inside shimmered, which I knew to be the equivalent of a frightful shudder.

Then patterns emerged inside the clear crystal. A whisp of motion, like a snake speeding through water. A human face, of all things, screaming silently. I smiled, then tugged the pyramid away in a pouch on my belt. It felt good to wear actual clothes again. Woollen shirt, linen and leather trousers. Not that self made crap I had to make do with or the improvised armour pieces I had tried to stop the Jaffa's weapon blasts with before. The very weapons that Arihes was now

describing to me.

It would take a while. Again, the nature of ghosts. They didn't talk, they remembered. They imagined. Dreamed, really. Every now and again you could coax them out of the perpetual nightmare that was their existence, trapped in a phylactery as they were, and make them remember something useful. Only for short times though. Soon, the images grew blurry and all that remained was chaos and harsh feelings when the madness reclaimed them.

It had taken me some time, but I had eventually squeezed 'her ladyship' enough to reveal the true nature of the 'Goa'uld', back when she was still alive. Parasites, ruling as pretenders to godhood over who knew how many cities, divided into several kingdoms. I hadn't found any of those yet, then again, this world was as large as any other. Thousands upon thousands of kilometres and I could only claim so much in a monthâ€!

I hadn't bothered to try out any of the Stargate addresses yet, both Jaffa and the Goa'uld had provided quite a few, yet there were so many other things to do, and my miserable excuses for craftsmen could not work even the simplest runes into their products.

Imbeciles.

"Three weeks! Even the most thick headed, retarded of Trolls would have learned how to runecraft in a matter of three weeks! How can they still not do it?"

In a sudden fit of rage I struck down on the table which shattered under the abuse.

"MALEK!"

"Y-y-y-y-y-yes, my Lord!" The little snivel almost turned his inkwell when he jumped to attention. I glared at him and he quickly steadied it, no drop spilled. He better. That was the result of several hours of work.

"Enough for today! Return to the library! And give notice to the carpenters! I need a new table! Some more silver in the inlays this time!"

Ye.. Yes, my Lord! At once!" And off he was. He and the other scribes were busy writing down my knowledge of runecrafting, simple spellwork and mundane constructs, as imparted on them by the library. In their language, which I had absorbed easily enough. So far, there had been only one casualty with this, a rather fragile old scribe who had cracked under this heavier exposure to my consciousness, and had been reduced to a quivering mess. The others were holding up reasonably so far. I had hopes that some of them at least would turn out to be able to learn some magic of their own and learn to take it, but as long as they held out long enough to transcribe everything, that was really worth it in any case. Finding new scribes should be possible, there were still several thousands of humans living in the city overhead, despite me conscripting some new ones every day. Some as warriors, some as scribes, always more as workers. One of the blacksmiths had actually known a way to customize steel in a way I had ever seen before, something about heat treating the metal with the help of certain chemicals with varying degrees of carbon content, and had himself been rather impressed with my blast furnaces and the purity

of my materials. He was playing around with several different elements now to add to the mix, testing, melting, tempering. Nothing substantial so far, but probably worthwhile eventually. The knowledge these people had about the universe was staggeringly low. As far as they were concerned, there were only five elements: Fire, earth, metal, water and finally wood of all things. Seven hellsâ€¦..

In the long run however, steel wouldn't cut it. Naquadah had so far resisted all attempts to smelt it, even though forging it was possible, and I needed to alloy it to be able to make fire staffs. Those things had catapulted skeletons from "marginally useful" right up to "really not all that bad" in terms of battlefield competency. I also had my doubts that the Jaffa flying machines could be brought down with bows and arrows, and I shivered in anticipation what a full flight of those things could do to a marching army. I had never seen all that much use in having flying machines of my own, but I wanted those things so badly! So many wonderful toys on this world.

Well, later. A lot later, actually. According to Arihes, those were armed with slightly different staff cannons than the ones I already had. More complex for one, for another, for some reason or other, the ones on the "Death Gliders" had an internal reservoir of a specialised liquid to turn into the orange fire that they propelled at their targets. Which was weird, now that I thought about it. He had just shown me that the small staffs could make do with what was literally hot air. Why not do the same with the bigger cannons? And what made those things fly in the first place? I knew the general principle from studying avian predators a long time ago when I had first seen such things. You had to mould the wings in a certain way if you wanted your machines to stay airborne for any length of time, but the means of propelling them? After the first few images of the engine had crystallized in my mind, I had gaped at even the smallest part in complete incomprehension and then decided to do the small steps first. After punishing Arihes for chuckling at me.

I patted my pet ghost in his pouch and was rewarded with another psychic howl. Hadn't been easy to get this to work either. The dual nature of Goa'uld and human had made it difficult to discern which of the two would actually be caught in the phylactery upon death. I had been simply curious at first, so I had taken some humans, implanted them with some of the leftover eels from the prison and then tried to capture one, then the other, or both ghosts in a crystal as they expired under my admittedly rather clumsy hands in the torture chamber. Capturing both had proven impossible with my current ritual, one would always get away to the afterlife, while the magic of the torture chamber bound the other as a vengeful spirit under my command, but I had eventually worked out a way to chose which one of the two.

Could have ripped the Goa'uld out first, I suppose, then torture that to death. In fact, now that I thought about it, this situation probably warranted a few new torture devices. They were so small, so my options were limited. Boiling them would probably kill them instantly, stretching might prove tricky as wellâ€¦ but what about sticking them with needles? Or some sort of grinder, perhaps?

Then again, they lacked the ability of speech in their natural form, so that would take half the sense out of it. If I couldn't distinguish their "Stop, stop, I'll talk!" screeching from their "Oh gods, this hurts!" screech, there really wouldn't be a point to

torturing a Goa'uld outside of a host.

The weapons, the gliders, the Stargate, the mineral, there were so many new things to do and to figure out around here. So many new things to see. Arihes had gone ahead and turned the crystal hardening around him into a tetrahedron, of all things. Usually they formed into ovals, or rarely spheres. Elves where very fond of the latter...

"Turns out you really are special. Aren't you, Arihes..? Who would have thought!"

* * *

><p>Invasion day. X-2 hours

I had been out and about, pondering things. Human I was not, with their limited method of perception, still, there was something to say for feeling something die beneath your feet instead of just sending a spell it's way and watching from afar. For the same reason I visited the surface every now and again.

Didn't mean I wanted to still be here when the sun came up. Still half an hour left or so, and if anything, the one I watched had a vested interest himself to no be out here for much longer.

Urden, my newest minion, was getting himself acquainted with the abilities that came with being a Vampire, his bloodred robe sticking out of the shadows whenever he emerged from one. I had basically given him the choice between this and black, seeing how those were the two hues that were the most easily fashioned at the moment, but I was getting the feeling that for hunting escaped Jaffa in the woods, a robe reaching down to his ankles wasn't the most practical choice of clothing in the first place. Well, he would learn. They couldn't exactly kill him and as long as there were Jaffa in the woods, at least I wouldn't have to worry about feeding him. Another reason for not spawning more Vampires. I didn't have the extra blood to sustain them.

I slowly made my way to a hilltop a kilometre or so away, pondering various things. Maybe now I should go and do some testing with the Stargate. I had the time, after all...

* * *

><p>X

As I watched, the metal monstrosity descended upon the Stargate. A hundred metres above it, it stopped and hovered in place, casting it's shadow so far away it might as well not have one. Something detached from the superstructure surrounding the pyramid with a loud clang and several things impacted the ground a few seconds later. Lances made of light speared the places of those impacts shortly thereafter and Jaffa began to step out of the dust they had thrown up. More and more appeared, staffs levelled, then formed into squares below their chariot, facing the city. As soon as one had stepped out of the dust cloud the impacts had summoned, another light streamed down into it and more Jaffa appeared. How many was this thing carrying? How was it possible to keep something this big afloat? Scratch that, how was it even possible to build a thing such as this?

This had to weigh hundreds of thousands of tons, so no way the thing in the middle was a balloon. They didn't have any Imps either, as far as I knew, so how had they even gotten their gods bothering hands on this much metal?

I eyed the moving spheres set into the underside of it suspiciously. Maybe do some testing first. My skeleton army had been marching into position since I had first spotted this thing, the first group had reached the ramparts between the city and the gate, Urden somewhere among them. I ordered him back. The sun was up now. He would not be able to help out here.

The second group had still some hundred metres to go, so I urged them into a run, while a hundred Imps expanded the tunnels ahead that were almost, but not quite in the right place.

From my vantage point I saw the Stargate ignite for the first time. First, the triangles lit up with blood red light, then a blue whirlwind shot forth from the ring. An honour guard formed in two rows, then out of the blue marched even more Jaffa. Wait, were those Jaffa? No, they had bird heads. So there were some other creatures around here to be had after all.

They were special, in any case, and after the sixth had marched down the pedestal their purpose became clear. A man emerged, his bare head reflected the light of the morning sun and I averted my eyes for a second, snarling at the uncomfortable brightness. His chest was bare as well and a golden cape flew around his shoulders. Six more bird headed bodyguards emerged from the ring behind him, then the blue disappeared with a flash.

I watched with interest as the procession marched towards the eastern gate of the city, a single square of Jaffa split up as they passed it and took position to either side of them, left, right and behind, in a manoeuvre carried out so smoothly it almost looked like flowing water from up here. I loved that discipline the Jaffa had about them. So much of it bled over when they turnedâ€|. .

When they reached what I assumed was shouting distance, the golden leader stopped. I had no idea what he was shouting, of course, I was kilometres away. Not that it mattered.

"Shoot the idiot!" I ordered the skeletons manning the wall, and immediately orange flickered to life. Volley after volley flew from the battlements, most of it hit the intended target â€“ which refused to so much as flinch at the barrage.

"Seven hells, what theâ€|?"

Return fire began to strafe the walls as the hundred or more Jaffa on both sides of the VIP tried to take out my skeletons. They enjoyed only moderate success in this. A skeleton, despite having not enough instinct for self preservation to fill a tankard, made for a relatively small target. Staff blasts taking out some rips wouldn't even bother them, pulling off a headshot at this range was rather hard, and if you did manage to squeeze a shot in between the crenelations and hit one in the shoulder, it would just take it's staff in the other hand and continue shooting. I had actually deliberated having them strip out of their armour to make them even smaller targets, but decided against it. It did take some of the heat

at least. By now I was loosing some regardless, but the Jaffa, devoid of any cover, were loosing more. And yet, despite repeated hits, that golden sod was still standing.

Movement caught my attention. The chariot was rotating, aligning one edge with the city gate. I raised an eyebrow in anticipation. They were going to do my testing for me, weren't they?

A second later, a series of bright flashes proved me right and the gate was torn asunder in a series of explosions. As if that was not enough, another series of bolts lashed out to demolish the wall for a dozen meters in both directions. Then the army started to advance.

I frowned. It made sense. They had staffs, they had cannons, they had bigger cannons on the gliders, so of course this Behemoth was going to have bigger ones still. A lot bigger, it seemed. That might prove to be a problem.

I eyed the floating fortress. Well, no matter how big the bolts these fired, they couldn't beat me with this, they had to come down for that, sent soldiers, smash their way into my dungeon. And they had made a mistake already. I waited for the squares to reshape themselves as they marched, advancing on the gap of the wall. The vanguard was already inside the city. Not that there was anything left of worth in there, by now everyone had fled underground.

"Aaaaaaaand now!"

This was so much more fun to watch from up top, I decided, as a chasm opened up beneath the Jaffa and swallowed a dozen rows. I had expected something to come from the gate, although not quite like this, and thus had had it surrounded with subterranean ramparts for my warriors to march to the surface on and pitfalls my Imps could open up from below. A good part of the army just disappeared as the support struts were cut and the ground collapsed, and their fellows at the edge got immediately peppered with staff blasts coming from out of the darkness below. Then my own warriors emerged, charging. That would increase my casualties somewhat, as even a missed shot now had the very good chance to hit someone in the next row, but I needed to get into close range so those cannons couldn't tear them apart. I made a mental note to make large shields for the front rows to carry. I couldn't melt Naqudah yet, but maybe forge welding would be enough.

I eyed the city. Fighting had erupted there too, with skeletons firing at whoever had made it to the walls from the questionable safety of clay huts. Jaffa casualties were mounting here too, since the chariot's barrage had of course destroyed quite a bit of cover.

For a moment I played with the thought of taking part, maybe throwing some fireballs into the mix from here, but quickly called myself an idiot for the very idea. Sure, I could do considerable damage, but a single one of those big bolts would pretty much pulverize me and then my dungeon would shut down until evening again. By that time this many troops could very well have slaughtered their way through all my minions and devastated my dungeon here. I wasn't about to sacrifice a month of work for a few seconds of fun. There was a time and a place for that, sure, but this was neither. A patch of dirt next to me

mysticized and an Imp head peeked out, only to shreek back in terror as it glanced the sun. I hopped down, strode along the tunnel this one and three more had dug towards me. After a few metres the hill began to tremble as I channelled my magic into it and the corridor collapsed behind me. Couldn't very well give them a back entrance, now could I? Then I jumped into an Imp, ordered the others to follow and hurried along with my little escort. It was time to get into the thick of it.

* * *

><p>Dungeon under Bahal â€“ Servant Quarters

"Teela! Oh, thank the gods!"

"Malek! What is going on?" What was that tremor?"

>"Lord Ra has arrived to take back Bahal! The Keeper is engaging his Jaffa, everyone is fleeing into the Deeper Dungeons. Get the girls, you have to leave!"<p>

"What? But..."

"Now! Follow the Imps, they are leading everyone down into the deeper tunnels."

"Tunnels! Malek what are you talking about? Surely it is more save hereâ€¦?"

"No! This is to near the surface. The Keeper fears the fighting will spill into the tunnels and our doors will not hold against staff weapons. I don't want you here when it all goes down. Now go, all of you."

"You are not coming with us?"

"Iâ€¦ can'tâ€¦ Not yet. I have things to..."

"Malek! You are a scribe, not a warrior! Your place is not there!"

"I need to go, Teela. The Keeper has ordered us to secure the contents of the library."

"WHAT! Books? You are running towards an army of Jaffa for boo.. Malek, youâ€¦!."

"Teela! Teela, he would know. I can'tâ€|. I have to heed his commands, or..."

"â€|"!

"Go, love. Follow the others. Take my heart with you, so I will find you again."

* * *

><p>Ha'tak "Twilight of Malk'Shur" - Pel'tak

"The enemy is retreating, Mylord Abtu! Lord Neth reports victory!"

"Victory! Ha...!" Abtu cracked his knuckles against one another. "Tell him to get going and pursue! Where did those warriors even come from?"

"Lord Neth reports there is a network of tunnels. They emerged from the ground, and he chased them back into it."

Tunnels? It couldn't beâ€¦ them? Here? They hadn't opposed Ra this openly since the dawn of their misbegotten movementâ€¦ But who else wielded the Goa'ulds own weapons and dug into the ground like moles? Open combat, who would have thought.

"Subterranean scan! Show me where they are hiding!" A few seconds later, Abtu was very impressed by what he saw. A network indeed. Large tunnels, vast empty caverns, interconnected pathways, thousands of life forms scurrying about â€" and that was only as deep as his sensors would penetrate. This had to be the biggest Tok'Ra base ever discovered! The miners had probably spooked them as they dug down further, forcing them to act.

"This must be big enough to hold all of them! What a price!"

"Mylord! Lord Neth reports heavy resistance in the tunnels! He sounds ratherâ€|. Agitated!"

"Tell him to fall back and secure the Stargate! None of them must escape! Raise the ship by 500 metres. We will collapse their rat's nest from up here!"

"...Mylord! The city! The mine!"

"A city full of traitors, if they haven't fought, or weaklings if they let such ilk defeat them! If any of them is still alive, none deserves our concern!"

But the mineâ€|. that was another matter. Bahal had suffered quite a bit already by the looks of it and Geb had sent him here to restore Naquadah production, not vaporize what remained of it. Much as he hated it, his gunner had a pointâ€|

"Get us up higher, 500 above the city centre, Neth is to secure the gate, then enter the city and subdue any resistance. Gunner! Small arms to support the troops! Bombard anything outside the city parameter with heavy bolts. I want those Tok'Ra buried!"

* * *

><p>Bahal prison complex

"This is it", he thought. The tremors. Orbital bombardment to flush them out, then crush them like bugs. This was the time.

He flashed a grimace at a nearby Imp. Some of the little monsters, smaller brothers to the Axe Demons, always lingered around the place, grinning, taunting, laughing. Not any more.

The creature grimaced back. Come on. One step closer. Now! He catapulted himself against the bars, reached through and grabbed the

little pest. As he pulled it closer, his brothers sought to help.

"Hold him!" "Get the pick!" "Kill it! Kill it!"

A chorus of voices, fed by weeks of captivity. Of humiliation. Of impudence! None of that mattered now. He had the pick. His key to freedom and revenge. Finally.

"Brothers!" He broke his shackles with a single stroke, then held the instrument up high. Our Lord has arrived! Justice will be done! Vengeance will be ours! Free yourselves from the chains and let us be free of this place!"

A roar of half a hundred voices answered him. He went ahead and freed every single one, then struck the lock apart himself. Out they stormed, righteous rage and twisted metal bars their only weapons. But Vatir of Hebron was back where he belonged. Leading warriors to victory!

* * *

><p>Deep under Bahal â€“ An hour later

They had reached the elevators faster than I would have thought possible. Then again, with artillery support like this, I should not be surprised. Whenever my skeletons fired upon the enemy Jaffa, their hiding place went up in a plume of dust, smoke and fire. I had switched tactics then, grouped them together and sent them charging into the invaders. That would end with them in pieces too, but overall had worked a lot better. And now that they were pouring into my tunnels by the dozens, the game would change. The tunnels outside the city were straining under the constant rain of bolts more powerful than I had imagined that thing being capable of sending against them. The tremors could be heard all the way here and already I was loosing humans to cave-ins. Precious, precious knowledge imparted on them, lost forever, my time with them wasted, my plans delayed.

I kicked a charred Jaffa skull hard enough to dislodge it from its spine, then continued down the corridor, fingers still crackling with lightning. In my pouch, Arihes was practically dancing, which he would be regretting later, up ahead I could feel my second major asset approaching.

"Urden. How goes the hunt?"

"_Delicious, Masterâ€|. Most deliciousâ€|._ He smiled, his teeth red for a change. _"Though I don't like the look of these weaponsâ€| They are slowâ€|. Unsuit for the tunnelsâ€|.. But the lightâ€|._"

Bugger. Don't tell meâ€|

"Have they hit you yet?"

Urden tilted his head, then raised his hands forming an open circle. He looked almost insulted. Still. This was potentially bad. Killing Vampires was notoriously hard. You could slash them, burn them, hack them to pieces, usually they came out of it hardly any

worse for wear. Technically, they weren't alive in the first place.

I felt like banging someone's head against the nearby wall but kicked another skull instead. Amongst the few things that could kill a Vampire permanently, sunlight was top of the list. Half the Jaffa had worshipped this Ra, who might or might not be the god of the sun, with a fanaticism that would have done a Dark Angel proud. One of them had claimed that their staffs fired a piece of his magic, that they were actually fuelled by sunfire. I doubted this to be true, having talked to Arihes, but I couldn't be sure! Usually I would have shoved a Vampire in the way of a firing squad and told him not to flinch at this point, but I couldn't do that in this case. Because Vampires were walking dead, they couldn't be healed, their wounds instead slowly disappeared. Damage inflicted through holy weapons or sunlight however, didn't heal at all. So I couldn't just test this. Not now. I only had the one.

Another particularly strong tremor sent a ripple through the wall and a crack spread along the bricks faster than the eye could see. Well, later. Time for damage control.

"Master. The Intrudersâ€| Your ordersâ€|?" The whisper dripping with barely concealed anticipation and hunger.

"Go. Hunt. Secure the areas around the elevators to the deeper levels. They must not discover or tell of them! I will collapse the elevator to the city, then kill any I can find."

Urden, with one arm across his chest and the other across his back, bowed, took a step back and vanished. The last thing I saw of him was a rather satisfied grin before the shadows swallowed the Vampire whole.

Well, that was that problem taken care of. Deep below thousands of Imps, pulled back from all nearby operations, were hard at work digging out several large stairways, spiralling down deeper and deeper into the earth. The enemy had some scrying ability after all, and unexpectedly, they had the upper hand in firepower to a ridiculous degree. But they would not catch me down here. If I had to, I would dig down into the burning bowels of the planet and collapse the tunnels behind me. Let's see them blast their way down there!

Now to find some more Jaffa to went my anger on and play a little sharade. Maybe I shouldn't collapse the elevator after all. Maybe, in a few hours, when sunset was close, I should allow them to "kill" me. Sure, that would pause the digging, but it would also kill all the lights, if I cut the conduits from the batteries. See if that convinced them of their victory against me. Not that I liked the idea all that much but it appealed to me way more than fighting an uphill battle against an unending enemy, with 1 Vampire and my Combat Imps as my only assets while my humans multiplied. That would take decades! No. Better to swallow my pride and lull them into a false sense of security.

I strode towards one of the smaller patrols intruding upon my territory, conjuring as I went.

I could wait, Lord of the Sun!

I could ride this out!

I would get you yet!

* * *

><p>Akhett-Aten â€“ Throneworld of Ra

It was night outside, not that the city cared. Aton, capital of the Galaxy, home of the Supreme System Lord, never slept. The single largest population of both bonded Goa'uld, human slaves and Jaffa in the Galaxy filled this world, lifting it high above any other. Tithes from hundreds of minor Goa'uld, from all System Lords made their way here in an unending stream, fueling the fires of the factories, as well as the hunger of the shipyards and those who toiled away in them.

For eons Aton, nay, the entire planet had prospered under his stewardship. But no more. Amun smiled. No more, never again! As he ascended the stairs to the throne, he felt the years of humiliation drift away, the insults cleansed from his mind as the artificial, shadowless light of the chamber washed over him. No one had seen Ra for six months. No one had heard for him for four. It was him, Amun, who had found the remains of his pleasure barge in the Abydos system three weeks ago, and he had been planning this moment ever since. Finally at the top of the stairs, he turned around, raised his hands and basked in the glory as the light flared up, cloaking him brightness, forcing everyone present but him to shield his eyes. Manipulating the machines of the throne had been the easiest part. He had replaced administrators and fleet Admirals, executed known spies he no longer needed tolerate, created new titles and bribed both minor and major lords. All in the name of Ra.

No More.

"Hear me! Ra is gone! Amun is gone! From this day on until the end of eternity, Amun-Ra shall rule." He touched his ring and the Ear-rings he wore unfolded into the double crown that had always been his birthright.

"Hail, Amun-Ra", the chamber erupted. "God of the Galaxy! Supreme System Lord!"

Amun, once High Lord of the Ogdoad, once slave to Ra, would be servant no longer.

End of Chapter

* * *

><p>And with this, I'm afraid__ â€“ The story as it is published has now caught up with the story as it has __been written. So far I have been typing down stuff that was lying around on paper, adding things, fleshing it out, correcting the grammar â€“ which I am still doing, btw, embarrassing enough. Now I understand the importance of proof readersâ€|. _

_From today on onward, I will be working from notes. I have sketched out the general idea well into the first two seasons of Stargate SG1,

so this story will be around for a while, but I am afraid this is the end of the bi-weekly updates. What that will mean for chapter length remains to be seen. I didn't mean to make this one exceed 10.000, it just ended up that wayâ€|_

Also, some other things. I have been writing these little annotations to concepts that I think might confuse you readers if I left them out. I don't want the footnotes to do the storytelling â€" although that can be fun too â€" but I want to give you some information about my thought processes.

Anyone who hates this: Now is your time to speak up or remain forever silent.

Something else that might bother some of you. The program I am writing in is set to "English (Great Britain)", which, I am aware, differs somewhat from American English. Also, does it bother any of the Americans among you at all that I am using metric units instead of imperial ones?

Last but not least, no afterword in this chapter, a response to our first guest:

I have a special place in my heart for the Horned Reaper, and a special place for him in this story. I don't quite know where to bring him in yet.

* * *

><p>It has to be saidâ€|. _

_**Preon-Class â€" **_As far as I know, there are no different "classes" of Ha'tak. There are the flagships, there is Ra's pleasure barge and then there is that one version that we never got to see, because a super powered SG-1 destroyed in dry dock. Ha'taks are Jack-of-all-trades, they carry troops, cargo and Death Gliders, are both warships, carriers and troop transports. I just thought it stood to reason that some Goa'uld might specialize some of their fleet, to be better at certain things than the average ship of the line, and the idea would spread over time (we are talking thousands of years after all). I am not actually contradicting anything in the series here, but it doesn't support the idea either. _

The Preon is meant to be a large troop carrier, more than anything else, it thus sacrifices most of it's carrier abilities (but not all), relying mainly on the ship itself for fire support. It really isn't necessary, but it just popped into my head and it sounded so niceâ€| Any suggestions on a name for a pure carrier?

_**Ha'taks **_â€" Goa'uld Motherships are rather large bastards. They get roflstomped in the later seasons, so we as science fiction fans tend to forget that and to marginalize them. According to a Stargate SG1 DVD commentary, the tetrahedron in the middle is 300 meters high, that is about the length of a "Gerald R. Ford" super carrier, the biggest warship build by man IRL, a warship that weighs 100.000 metric tons and took 4 years to build â€" and built it was by highly trained professionals with lots of specialized equipment, not by slaves living in hovelsâ€|.._

_**Ha'tak firepower **_â€" In the last episodes of the first season,

Alternate Carter mentions that the "blasts on the east coast were the equivalent of 200 Megatons nuclear warheads". Since the ships in the same story are also shrugged off a 1000 megaton nuke, which seems congruent, I tend to go with that number. (Of course that also means that Death Gliders do exactly nilch to Ha'tak shields, their weapons, as seen in the show, are not even in the kiloton range). 200 Megatons of boom, for the uninitiated, would burn anything in a hundred kilometre radius nice and crispy, and if you are closer than 4 km, no one will find enough of you to bury. And yet SG1 has seen some close up and lived to tell the tale. So it stands to reason that A) Ha'tak have some smaller guns or B) The yield of those things is variable. Won't make a difference for this story, either way, both would explain some of what we saw on screen._

**Classical elements** " Several systems exist, trying to explain the nature of all things. All equally wrong as far as we know. Fire, earth, metal, water and wood are the Chinese subset._

Malk' Shur " We never learned what that bt in Jolinar's name meant, did we?

**Abtu & Neth** " Abtu & Anet are two mythological beasts, fish, that accompany Ra on his daily journey across the skies, both guarding and warning him._

**Amun** " One of the oldest Gods in egyptian mythology. Husband to Amaunet. __*wink*__

_**Amun-Ra** " __more or less a fusion of two gods into one, said gods being Amun and Ra. Maybe they felt they had enough gods already?_

**Aton** " __Apparently an attempt by Pharaoh Amenhotep IV. to install monotheism. Aten or Aton was supposed to be the only god the Egyptians would henceforth need. Didn't last very long._

**Akhett-Aten** " __Akhetaten, a city build in the middle of the desert by the same Pharaoh as the new Egyptian capital. Didn't last very long either. _

**Ogdoad** " __The original eight Egyptian Gods, who basically made themselves when there was nothing._

**Naquadah** " We don't actually know all that much about Stargate's resident flavour of applied phlebotinum, other than that it does whatever the plot demands, is very heavy and probably not radioactive (radioactivity results in an element falling to pieces over time. I have no idea how they determined the age of the Antarctica Stargate, but if the stuff **WERE** radioactive, the Stargate would have taken itself apart over a period of 50 million years. Either that or it's up there with Tellurium-128). _

_If I ever get around to it, I will probably take the fan-theory that pops up every now and again, that being that liquid Naquadah is an Allotrope of Naquadah. _

_One question though: If Naquadah is such a good heat/energy sink with a tendency for a critical existence failure if you pump in too

much â€“ how do you melt the stuff without it exploding?_

**Mining **â€“ Nowadays, mostly anything that rolls, flies, crawls or creeps about a battlefield is somehow made of iron â€“ or steel more precisely, but steel is an alloy that is composed of mostly iron anyway (usually in excess of 95%, plus a small percentage of carbon and some other choice materials).

_How do we get all that Iron? Same way a Keeper does, we dig for it. Iron ore, good iron ore that is, contains about 40% iron, which means taking aforementioned numbers into account, for every ton of Steel you need to dig your merry way through 2,375 tons of rock â€“ that's about half a cubic meter of bedrock, and that's only if you have already found a veinâ€|. _

_With the aforementioned "drilling" speed of Imps, aka 1,440 km per day, assuming the tunnels the little buggers dig are about $80 \times 100 = 800 \text{ cm}^2$, that's about 115 m^3 per day, or 230 tons of Iron (in a good vein). _

_230 per day means 84.000 tons per year (still only one Imp). For comparison, modern Germany mines about 400.000 tons of iron every year â€“ which is not actually all that much â€“ and a modern steelworks produces about 100.000 tons of steel in the same time (which is enough to make an awful lot of swords...). _

Where am I going with all this and why should you care?

_Well, the real production bottleneck is not the Imps, but the workers. In the workshop. Just imagine for a moment, if you will, a storehouse that fills with 230 tons of iron every day (that's a cube with 3m side length, btw. almost as heavy as 4 "Leopard 2" Main Battle Tanks. Because more numbers...). How long do you think it would take even a hundred blacksmiths, armed with a hundred more helping workers and packmules to carry all that stuff to and fro the smelters, never mind actually turn it into steel? Could probably be done but would be one hell of a caravan, and that is just what one Imp would mine. _

_And then of course, most star ships in Stargate aren't even made of something as mundane as iron based steel but instead of Naquadah/Trinium/Carbon/whateverâ€|. _

End
file.